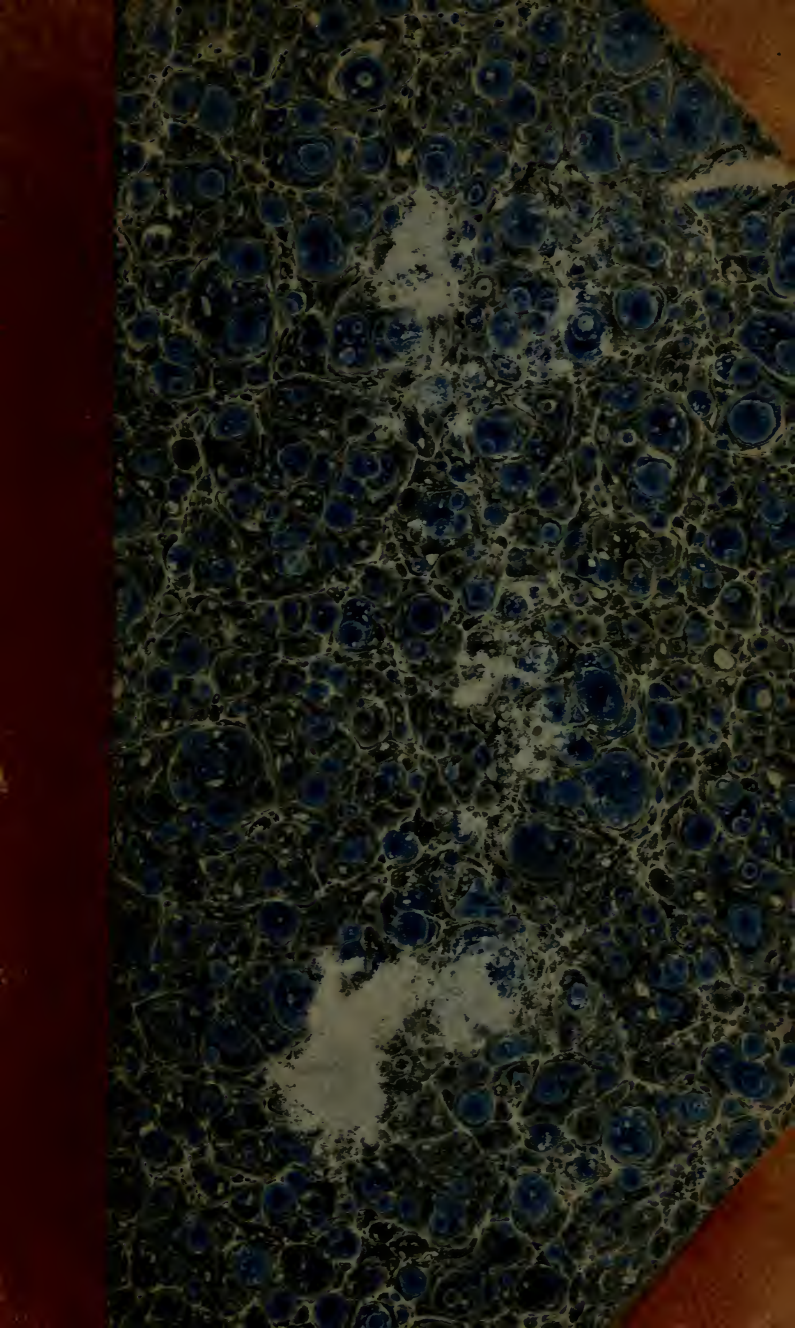

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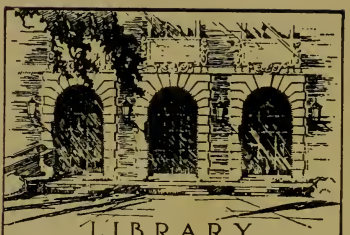

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THE

MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE HEIRESS," "AGNES SERLE," &c.

Je n'ai pas de la prétension, vous le savez; je laisse errer ma plume.

PUCKLER MUSKAU.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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1836.

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THE

MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

La faculté de sentir à demi était refusée aux habitudes de sa nature; sa vie n'avoit pas été arrangée dans ce système.

M. LE VICOMTE D'ARLINCOURT.

THE painful flush which at one time during the contention had crimsoned the generally pale cheek of Florence had subsided into a softened glow that heightened her beauty, without being sufficiently marked to attract observation to itself; her eye had lost its indignant fire, and only shone with its usual touching lustre; her sweet voice was again heard in its calm, unvarying tone, replying briefly to her com-

panion's questions; and the strongest trace to be discovered of her late vexation was an additional languor and frigidity. These might indicate depression after over-excitement, or an increased caution in regard to her companion, whose power and penetration a painful experience had taught her to respect. Clanellon was seeking to charm her still more with the fascinations of his eloquence; and, as though provoked at having been charmed, Florence was counting the stitches audibly, the mechanical, mindless numbers contrasting strangely with one of his brilliant sallies, when a window was thrown up by a strong arm, and a young man springing over a low basket of flowers stood before them.

Unannounced and a stranger to Clanellon, who was scarcely pleased at his unceremonious entrance, the viscount's quick eye sought to gather at a glance the character and purpose of the unwelcome visiter. A favourable observer might have proclaimed him good-looking, oc-

casionally handsome; but it was the beauty of expression, not of form, for the critics said he had not a fine feature in his face: in fact, it was the ever-varying expression of those features in which lay his only claim to beauty; but their very mobility, if a physical charm, was the sign of a moral defect. You had but to look upon him to read the feeling of the moment—the ruling impulse of the mind at that instant: but those feelings were changing, those impulses ever varying: neither inward thought nor outward expression bore the same character two hours following; thus noting the mind's defect—it had no stability!

"A breath could turn him, as a breath had turn'd."

For good, for ill, none could tell what the next mood would be. His friends mourned his sudden transitions from right to wrong; his enemies (and he made many in sport or in carelessness more than from purpose) were amazed at his sudden returns from wrong to right. He acted from impulse as a child,

sometimes gentle, sometimes froward ; and, like a child, had no governing principle, unless his own will could be considered such ;—that was his ruler. He had acquired no self-control : he was capable of a great sacrifice for one he loved, he could be generous to a fallen foe; but he scrupled not to destroy the happiness of all around by sudden bursts of fury, or, if worried himself, could worry others in a more petty way ; and where he disliked rather than hated, could exercise a talent for annoying rarely surpassed. He was like some stately ship wandering over the world of waters without a rudder ; in danger herself, and endangering others, even whilst sailing on a glassy sea, —in still more fearful peril amid waves and breakers. With eccentric habits, and no objection to be considered singular, his words and manners were rarely common-place ; and even his acts, as on this occasion, were anything but servile copies of the general herd.

Clanellon guessed something of this as he

looked on the slight figure, scarcely reaching the middle height, and changeable features of the young man so suddenly placed before him. He guessed also that this unexpected visiter was not in the most placid of moods; and as he encountered his eye for an instant, he guessed further that he looked on him with no charitable feeling.

"Is that you, Dunrayne?" said Florence, rising and holding out her hand with more animation than Clanellon had yet seen her vouchsafe to any gentleman under fifty—certainly far more than she had ever vouchsafed to him.

"Yes, it is Dunrayne, and you did not expect him," replied her visiter, only half mollified by her friendly warmth, though he pressed her extended hand.

"How should I expect him, when his last letter to his mother announced an intention of remaining absent a month longer at the least? I must agree with Mrs. Panter, and always expect

Lord Dunrayne to do that against which he has the most violently protested."

"Mrs. Panter is a huge mass of maliciousness: you would never think of making her your model."

"I really cannot pretend to answer for myself—such strange things come to pass."

"Strange things indeed! I am no longer a welcome visiter, Florence," said the young man in open petulance.

"*Cela dépend*," replied Florence with an arch smile and an upraised finger.

Lord Dunrayne coloured slightly; but his ill humour was modulated by that glance, though not appeased; and throwing his hat on the table so carelessly that it rolled off on Clanellon, he seated himself on the sofa by the side of Florence, who bent over her work to conceal a smile. Dunrayne made no apology for his carelessness, and Clanellon took no further notice of the hat than to push it from him with no very gentle touch.

That Dunrayne should address Miss Lyle as

Florence unrebuked, a presumption on which he had never ventured till that morning—that she should favour him with an animated welcome and an arch smile, the which he had been in vain striving to obtain for weeks—and the fiery glances and contemptuous mien of this welcome visiter, were accidents neither unmarked nor unfelt by Clanellon, and it required no little effort to control his wrath; but he did control it, and not a trace was visible. One look at Florence, as she bent over her work after the fall of the hat, had convinced him that, though she might seek to check Dunrayne's temper so as to prevent a quarrel between the gentlemen, she could not in her heart feel much regret at any vexation he might suffer—she would consider he deserved it by his prior conduct. To permit her to enjoy his vexation was a triumph that should not be hers, and he resolved his temper should appear unruffled, let what would occur. And he kept his resolve. Would that more did the like!

"Put away that horrid work, Florence,"

said Dunrayne, taking it out of her hand. "You know you never work at it when I am with you—only when in the company of the stupid or disagreeable;" and his eyes turned on Clanellon with no courteous meaning; but that gentleman's answering smile only showed a participation in the gaiety of him who spoke.

"Then you must make yourself particularly agreeable to console me for depriving me of my employment: I have become a great work-woman of late."

"Have you?—But there are strange things in this world, as I said just now. You have been very delightfully engaged for the last few weeks, I make no doubt," continued Dunrayne with a sneer scarcely compatible with politeness.

"Not exactly—I think I have been duller than usual," replied Florence quietly, suppressing a smile.

"That is strange!" remarked Dunrayne, looking half triumphantly, half searchingly, from Florence to Clanellon.

"Allow me to introduce you," said Florence, choosing thus to interpret his look. "Lord Dunrayne—Lord Clanellon."

The bow of the former was less remarkable than his stare: the bow of the latter was all courteous politeness.

"Another piece of forgetfulness," she continued. "I hope Lord and Lady Aggenthorpe are well."

"They are quite well, and dine here to-day, they told me, rather to my amaze: I thought Aggenthorpe Castle owed Atherton Hall a dinner."

"I believe such may be the case. How I wish we could persuade your noble father to overlook these petty punctilios, and to feel we ever hold ourselves honoured and delighted by his presence! But I am afraid these hopes are vain."

Dunrayne shook his head, though evidently pleased at the terms in which she mentioned his father, and Florence continued—

"I am rather afraid the earl will not find our party to-day exactly what he could wish. Some were invited without due consideration, whose society can afford him no pleasure; but the party is large, and he can select."

"In plain English, Florence, your tact alone was not consulted in the invitations; and Mr. Lyle intends it to be a splendid banquet, partly in honour of a pauper earl who may chance to judge this gorgeousness an insult. With every friendly feeling towards each other (as far as acts are concerned) our honoured parents do not understand each other, and wound by the excess of their good will: we young ones manage much better. No looking grave at my hinting your father does not always sympathise with feelings which even he who suffers from them cannot always comprehend. What induced my father to accept this invitation, since it appears it was not your especial pleading, which is irresistible?"

"I scarcely know; but I believe the earl

had kindly exerted his interest in favour of a protegé of ours, and my father said so much of gratitude, and was so warm in his pressing, that he could not be denied. So at least I have heard hinted from others."

"And you were vexed, Florence?"

"How can you think so?"

"And your father?"

"— Knows nothing of this. If the earl would but believe we honour and esteem his high qualities more even than his rank, and that we do not think money the highest good, he would never mistrust my dear father."

"Ah, Florence! if—" said Dunrayne in a softened voice, for his father's praise from her lips was ever delightful. Then catching the keen look of Clanellon fixed upon him, he stopped abruptly, his brow again clouded, and his mind resumed its former mood.

"How very beautiful you are to-day, Florence! I should imagine the occurrence of something pleasurable this morning, that has painted your cheek with that delicate glow."

"Were your tone as flattering as your words, I should be tempted to say nothing pleasant had occurred this morning till your arrival: but you look and speak so moodily, I doubt your deserving such a compliment."

"A compliment, Florence! Then it is not a truth?"

"Make it such by dismissing that frown, and entertaining me, instead of indulging in your own idle fancies."

"Idle fancies!—are they idle fancies?"

"Worse, if they annoy yourself and others."

"Whom are you afraid I should annoy?" he demanded brusquely, glancing towards Clanellon.

"Me, and any others who may unhappily cross your path. Tell me of dear Emma," she added, willing to turn the conversation.

"Emma was very well when I saw her last, but complained bitterly of your long and unaccountable silence, not knowing how pleasantly you have been engaged for the last

few weeks. You have been very gay and very happy, I hear," he said sarcastically.

"I am not aware that I have been very gay or happy for the last few weeks: on the contrary, I am inclined to say, less so than usual. The day after Emma's complaint to you, she found my fancied silence arose from the incorrectness of the direction with which she had supplied me; and I have received a letter from her since, containing the apologies due to me as the most punctual of correspondents."

Rebuked by the quiet manner in which Florence replied to his petulance, and believing Clanellon was enjoying his vexation, Dunrayne turned from Florence and addressed his conversation to the viscount.

His observations were near approaches to sneers; but Clanellon's replies were gentlemanly and polite, it being his resolution to afford his rival (for such he considered him) no triumph, however slight.

"You have been passing your time pleasantly, I hope, Lord Clanellon?"

"Very much so: I could not possibly do otherwise."

"Oh, certainly not! Mr. Lyle is so hospitable, and Miss Lyle so delightful. No wonder you cannot tell when to tear yourself away."

"I shall indeed experience great difficulty in so doing when the fatal hour shall arrive; but I have not yet been called on to make the fearful trial. At present I am still a petted guest; but I should not be surprised if some time hence Mr. Lyle were obliged absolutely to turn me and my luggage out of doors, as the only chance of being quit of me."

Dunrayne looked very much as if he would fain perform the task himself on that very instant; but after consideration he contented himself with words instead of acts.

"Ay, or bribe your tailor, or your shoemaker, or some other troublesome fellow, to send and arrest you. Are you in parliament? I forget."

Clanellon's debts were enormous; and he had been defeated in a contested election by a cousin of Dunrayne's. His colour rose, but he showed no other sign of wrath.

"A very clever plan. Suppose you propose it to Mr. Lyle: for I have been in such a state of enchantment ever since my arrival, that I suspect some violent measures will be required to eject me."

"Really!—But no wonder! Miss Lyle is famed for her powers of attraction; and her attention to her guests is worthy admiration;" looking at Florence, as he spoke, with any feeling rather than approbation.

"Those are points on which none could differ," replied Clanellon with an animated bow to the lady.

"Lord Clanellon's praise must be highly gratifying," rejoined Dunrayne with fierceness.

"No praise can be flattering which is known to be insincere; and I must entreat you to

select some other subject for discussion than Miss Lyle," said Florence rather haughtily, indignant that Clanellon should presume to commend her courteous demeanour towards himself.

"What subject can we select so worthy of comment?" asked Dunrayne in seeming gallantry but real wrath.

"We will discourse of things, not persons," said Florence coldly, with a rebuking look.

"By all means, Miss Lyle; anything to please you: I am ever agreeable. Shall we discuss rank and riches separately, or conjoined? Their comparatively little worth when separated, or their almost superhuman power when united? We poor lords," glancing at Clanellon, "who have scarce a sous—beggared by our fathers' extravagance, or our own, will take the one side, and, knowing the evils of poverty from experience, descant on the glories of wealth; whilst you, cradled in pomp, shall hold high discourse on the value of a long descent,—the pride, the power of a title."

"I doubt the wisdom of your choice as to a subject for discussion," remarked Florence.

Dunrayne heeded not her still more rebuking manner; but, delighted that his arrows had not been shot without effect, he hoped on both, proceeded in the same style.

"You are mistaken, Miss Lyle; there was much wisdom in the choice of the subject; though a lack of it, I admit, in the distribution to the disputants. You shall become the champion of rank alone, scorning the wealth with which you have been sated; I will take the part of riches, knowing the pains and penalties of penury; whilst Lord Clanellon, superior to us both in wisdom, shall vaunt and example the glory of the two united. *Apropos des bottes*, I understand your lordship intends to give up pictures for the pen and the ledger—the betting-stand at Newmarket for a high stool in Mr. Lyle's counting-house; some say, in the expectation of becoming in due time connected with the firm. Is it so?"

Clanellon's wrath was with difficulty re-

strained; but it was restrained, and he answered gaily and politely, though Dunrayne's glances from him to Florence might have almost warranted a burst of fury.

"The report your lordship mentions is like many of its kind, a vision rather than a reality. Much as I am indebted to Mr. Lyle for his kindness and hospitality, I doubt his receiving me as a clerk, lest my ignorance and stupidity should set all in confusion."

"You are too modest, my lord. I will answer for it that neither your ignorance nor stupidity will bring injury to yourself or others; so call on me to give you a character. I had understood it was a settled thing that you were to form one of the house, and that you had already been employed on various occasions. One must begin with a low station first, and errand-boys have become important personages ere now."

"I feel myself honoured by the report, though it has not as yet become a truth. And

for the point of character, I thank your lordship for the offer, which shall be returned in kind on a more fitting opportunity," replied Clanellon, barely concealing his rising rage.

Dunrayne was delighted, and, heedless of consequences, would have continued to vent his own ill temper and increase his companion's; but Florence interposed.

"This is not the first false report, Lord Dunrayne, with which you have amused yourself without any consideration for the feelings of others; but as I am no friend to idle gossip, I insist it may be the last, and beg we may converse on some more profitable subject."

Her decided tone — her reproving look, should have taught him to forbear; but considering her interposition as in favour of Clanellon—her deepened colour as a confirmation of the report, he avoided her eye and continued—

"You are critical this morning, Miss Lyle: I can select no subject to your pleasure. Sup-

pose we converse on the sudden change of a woman's mood; the facility with which man wins her favour, the utter impossibility of retaining it; her taste for reports when they administer to her wishes, her distaste for them when they thwart her fancies for the moment. Will that subject content you? It will be a right wonderful and moving moral discourse, depend upon it; a truly profitable subject! and Lord Clanellon and myself will descant upon it *con amore*."

"Far be from me the rudeness to dispute the power of Lord Clanellon or yourself of discoursing *con amore* on the facility with which you win favour, and your inability to retain it; nor can I doubt its being a moral and profitable discourse; yet I am inclined to think it might be rendered still more moral and affecting if it had for its subject the wayward moods of man—the little control he seeks to exercise over them, and the ungenerous use he makes of the powers bestowed upon him."

Silenced for the moment by her commanding air, Dunrayne was still debating as to his future course, when Lord Clanellon's horse was announced to be in readiness. His lordship appeared to hesitate whether to linger or depart. He felt that his command of temper, at least of its outward show, had given him an advantage over his more furious opponent, and that he should leave the field with honour; and he was also aware that this calmness could not be much longer maintained under such repeated trials. On these accounts, therefore, retreat would be prudent: but then it was leaving a rival (that is, one who would fain become so, though judging from the lady's manner he had little cause to fear his success) to prate to his prejudice. Perhaps it might be better to stay and maintain if possible his calm superiority, since, if forced into a quarrel, he must still appear the injured party.

Florence saw the hesitation and decided the point. Words were getting too high to be

agreeable; for though she had little inclination to guard him from wounding speeches and bitter allusions on ordinary occasions, she highly disapproved of her own name being connected with his, even in the most obscure hint, the most insignificant report; and to prevent this in Dunrayne's present temper, her only course was to reduce the trio to a duo—or, if needs must be, to a solo.

"My father bade me say, Lord Clanellon, that he is much obliged by your offer of riding over to look at the carriage-horse to-day, and will decide this evening on hearing your report. Being some miles distant, I will not detain you."

"I have great pleasure in being employed in your service, and you may depend on a faithful report," replied Clanellon with a manner calculated to impress on Dunrayne's mind the existence of a much warmer feeling between Florence and himself than he had been ever able to awaken.

"It is not in my service you will be em-

ployed, Lord Clanellon; the horse is to complete my father's set, and will not be used by me: I should not have thought of troubling you."

"Say, of gratifying, not of troubling me, Miss Lyle; but I have scarcely less pleasure in being of service to your father. Good morning." And with a graceful bow to Dunrayne, scantily returned, he left the room.

Dunrayne watched him with no friendly eye, glanced at Florence, and then, without speaking, settled himself on the sofa with the determination of ill humour (throwing down a cushion in the arrangement), and employed his hands, if not his thoughts, in cutting to shreds the worsted intended for her work. Florence looked at him for some time with mingled feelings of regret and amusement; but when five minutes had elapsed without any change of mood or employment, and the litter of destroyed worsted began to be alarming, she considered it time to interfere.

"Do you remember the account of Charles

the Twelfth in the Turkish tent?" asked Florence archly.

"No, Miss Lyle—I do not!" replied Dunrayne in wrath, after a look—in plain fact, a stare—seizing a double portion of worsted as he spoke, and mincing it up still more unmercifully.

"You do not! I am surprised at that, having fancied you were taking the Swedish hero for your model. Do you not remember that, though a captive in the power of his captors, when the Turkish ambassador came to visit him by the Sultan's order, Charles sat on the sofa tearing the Turkoman's robe with his spur, in bold but impotent rage. The scene so struck me, I have often fancied, as I do now, the fiery monarch before my eyes."

"You had ever a lively imagination, Miss Lyle, and I am no match with you at mockings; but remember, by the sequel of your own tale, fiery spirits are not to be bearded with impunity!" exclaimed the young man fu-

riously, throwing down scissors and worsted, and trampling on the cushion at his feet.

"And what did the fiery spirit gain by his impetuosity?" asked Florence quietly.

"Revenge on some who would have wronged him."

"A right noble and Christian privilege!"

"It is a gratification, at any rate," replied Dunrayne doggedly. "Nay, I have heard you admire this same Charles yourself before now."

"Yes, he is rather a pet of mine, I must admit; though I am beginning to see from experience the folly of my admiration. I admired his gigantic daring; his bursts of generous feeling; his bold unwavering pursuit of what he considered just, in contempt of every danger: but I never praised his leaving his naturally wild temper unchecked and uncontrolled. I rather sigh to think what he might have been, than approve of what he was."

"You must take the evil with the good in

human character, Miss Lyle. This world is not a paradise, nor men angels, whatever it may please young ladies to suppose."

"I have no supposition of the sort, Lord Dunrayne, if you imagined me to be one of those visionary young ladies; but I have yet to learn that the difficulty of a task imposed by duty — a difficulty too often of our own increasing in the case of temper—can excuse us from attempting it. We stay the stream!—we embank the sea! Are human passions alone — those fearful torrents of destruction—those terrific devastating floods, destroying the immortal with the mortal, to be left without a check or bound?"

"Check them! bound them! by all means, Miss Lyle. Calm the ocean till it become a mill-pond!" and he pointed to its silver waters glittering in the distance. "Rule man to a machine! plane him, turn him to a sphere, without an angle or a salient point—nothing whereon to hang the words of a rebuke! Do

this, and will woman then be his fitting mate? But perhaps you would angelise both. I am in a teachable mood this morning; tell me how you would begin — read me a page in the catechism of perfection."

"You will excuse me, if, convinced that the labour would be thrown away, I decline the waste of time. Better let me order your lordship's horse."

"No occasion for that," detaining her; "an hour hence will suit me better." He spoke in a more subdued tone, checked by her decision; then added after a doubtful pause, "I rode over to persuade you to invite me to dinner today."

"Your behaviour has been so gentle and winning as to ensure success," replied Florence drily.

"Psha! you do not mind my mincing a little worsted?"

"Of course not—nor cutting up a friend!"

There was silence again, till Dunrayne,

turning towards her, gave way to a burst of passionate but better feeling.

"I may deserve this, Florence,—I know that I do; but if you could tell the half of the galling things that vex my spirit till they madden it, you would make excuses for my violence. You do know some, you may guess more; but all you cannot tell;—or, if you could, your gentle and well-regulated mind would never comprehend how such things chafe me as they do. I was cradled in pride, soothed with the tales of the grandeurs of my house, hushed by the splendours of the past. The hand was pointed over wide domains;—all those had been my ancestors', wrung from us by the iron hand of power. The grey walls that sheltered me had sheltered a long line of heroes. The portraits in the gloomy gallery were portraits of the noble and the brave; they were the records of high deeds and gallant names. True, our fortunes were not what they had been—a few acres only owned our rule: the upstart

of the hour might vie with, might surpass us in the tinsel of the present;—the merchant, the manufacturer — ay, even the peddling tradesman, the receiver of the weekly earnings of the poor, might outshine us in the trivial show of the passing day,—their staring houses, their modern mansions, their gaudy villas, might rise around us in all the mockery of ill taste; but the mighty memories of the past were as a leafless book to them—their names were not writ therein! And the villa and the mansion did rise around in flaunting glare: as the mean hearts of the earth mock at the noble spirits that they do not know, that they cannot tame, so these gaudy dwellings seemed to mock at our stately castle. Their gay and gilded equipages dashed along with a galling speed, as the Roman wanton careering over her father's corse;—a new generation mocking at the virtues and the glories of the old—treading out the footprints of the past. And all these things were done on those lands that had once been ours. Day

by day was the same story told—told too by a suffering and a tortured spirit, till it ate its way into my young heart, scorching up the springs of hope—withering the love which might else have been expended on mankind.

"From my childhood I had the feeling of having been oppressed—of being wronged. I knew that there was plenty among those who dwelt where those of my name had dwelt before: —in our stately home were the pinchings of poverty — the pride that strove to conceal it — the magnificent spirit of former times, struggling to maintain its grandeur, shrinking with horror from the hinting even of a meanness, yet bound and checked by its lowly state, till the heart was galled; the spirit cankered—as the poor captive, pining to be free, is galled and cankered by the restraining chain. It was a daily struggle, an hourly conflict. The high spirits of youth supported me for a time: as the heir, I was supplied when others wanted,

for none were to know the bitter truth. Vain hope! The world does know it—knows that the Earl of Aggenthorpe must live on moderate fare for weeks to banquet those who do but mock his folly! And I have helped to impoverish those I love—to wound more deeply still the heart that could before ill bear its sufferings!

"I had been taught to contemn—almost to hate—those living round us; in a word, to look upon them as usurpers — as doers of wrong to us; though, if wrong had been, it was the act of a government, not of individuals: but I had not been told the extent of our destitution, lest, in the carelessness of youth, I should betray it. Our privations—our seclusion—had been talked of as matters of choice, not of necessity. No, I knew not all, or I could not have increased the sufferings of the suffering by my folly and extravagance. If in my boyhood I felt as one who had been wronged, what should I feel when, grown to manhood, I mingled with my equals in birth and rank, and felt

the wearing of the chain that bound me? I was called penurious, nicknamed the young miser; plans were formed to cheat me;—I was made a mock and a jest! Think of this to my fiery spirit! Their light words fell on my soul like streams of molten lead, scorching, scathing all my hopes. Our pride forbade a disclosure of the truth. To escape these gibes, I was tempted to do as others did; and my father was more humbled still. I then shunned for a time the society of those with whom I could not compete in expenditure, though of equal rank. I returned to my stately, lonely home, to see my father chafing life away at the rising fortunes of the upstarts that outshone him. I came to know—I should say, to visit—some of those upstarts. I met them in no friendly mood, and some more than returned my open or thinly-veiled contempt. As a viscount I am tolerated, sometimes courted: your monied parvenus have a taste for titles. I make no apologies, Florence; you know that I mean not

this to apply to you or yours: but for you and Emma, I should be——And what am I now? I cannot—I dare not say! They call me eccentric, and allow me something of the latitude of a court fool — of a permitted jester. I thank them: let them laugh at my jests—let them think I heed not our poverty because I make a mock of it. Fools! blindest of the blind! not to see that I mock lest others should. Perhaps they do see it! and laugh the louder, as they laugh in secret.

"The poor say I have no pride! All can be affable to those from whom they fear no rivalry. Viscount Dunrayne no pride! Do you remember, Florence, how we first met as children, when you offered Emma the fruit and flowers, which she had admired through the pales?—how I pulled her away, saying that she should not take them from a merchant's daughter—nay, had the insolence to offer money?—By the way, all I had, or was like to have. I have never forgotten your indignant look at the proposition, and

how you joined your entreaties to poor Emma's when she cried for those lovely roses. Your words calmed them, as they have often calmed me since; and I look to you as a refuge from myself and others. You are startled at my vehemence, and yet you feel for me! Stop me not! Let me say all I would say—I have no other to whom I can say it. There would be cruelty in such a course to my father or to Emma; and they alone could understand me. It is selfish, most selfish, to say all this to you. But when was I otherwise? I would hear from your lips that you pity me. Yes! the proud Dunrayne would have your pity! The poor yet haughty descendant of a long line of heroes seeks for sympathy from the rich merchant's daughter! My moodiness must find a vent, and I would explain why I am fretted more than common.

"I have lately visited my two eldest sisters. I had heard of them as surrounded with splendour, but I knew little of them, for they are

some years my seniors. I have seen them now in their own houses. They have riches—they have splendour,—but the wife of the labourer who wins his bread by daily toil, if she but love her husband, and he love her, might shudder to change lots. They are rich, and beautiful, and titled; the crowd admires them,—but their homes are cheerless, and their hearts are blanks, or worse. The one has to endure the wilfulness of an old doting peer, whose waning intellect is but enough to show him where he can most deeply wound; the other has to deplore the insults of a man who openly upbraids her with having married him for money —that money which he refuses to her and to her sickly child. A selfish miser!—and a doting fool!—and they knew this when they married! —But there is no room for any child, save pride, at home. Poor Emma! she too must be a sacrifice, and for her I tremble. The other two are formed to bear; they are of that happy class who eat, drink, and sleep—all but feel:

and perhaps their fate is happier than I deem it. But Emma, she is different, she *does* feel—better 'twere that she did not. And woe for her beauty! it will win admirers, and she must be won. And I am not exempt; my title must be bartered for fine gold!—I could not brook the misery of my sisters' fates, and my temper broke forth more than once. I had been greatly chafed, when a letter came from my mother containing——But no matter what it contained—I returned on the instant—I questioned, and heard that which blighted the only hope that had ever shed its beauty on my path; and, before the shock was past, my father proposed an alliance hateful to me in every way. The lady is deficient in manners, mind, and temper. What then? she has birth, and fortune, and a pauper viscount cannot choose. I heard many reasons, understood none, and declaring, if compelled to marry her, I should be hanged for murder within a week: I never stayed till my father had recovered from the

shock, but galloped over here to seek for sympathy and comfort. Did I find them? A stranger was beside you—you were drinking in his honied words. I was wroth—I said what I should not have said—I did what I should not have done. Will you not forgive this, Florence? I came to you for pity; will you bid me depart in anger? You will not—there are tears in those gentle eyes—we are friends."

"Yes, friends!" said Florence with touching sweetness, yet a slight emphasis upon the word, placing her hand in his as she spoke with the frankness of early and confiding friendship.

Dunrayne understood, and whilst he pressed the hand he held, his face was bowed upon it that she might not see the quivering lip. Florence felt the hand that held hers tremble, and the silent tears fell unchecked, unheeded; she pitied him, and grieved that she could not soothe him as he wished.

After a painful pause, Dunrayne spoke—spoke abruptly—and with a dash of petulance,

for Clanellon's scattered cards attracted his attention.

"What are all these cards lying here for? Does their owner fear to be forgotten, that he thus forces his name upon your notice?"

"It was a piece of folly of Lord Clanellon's, which he forgot to repair."

"Of pleasing folly, Florence?"

"No; neither pleasing to me, nor profitable to him."

Dunrayne drew a freer breath, relieved by her prompt and decided answer; and his next remark was made with more composure.

"They say Lord Clanellon has been staying here this month; that he is your constant companion in walks, drives, or rides; that he is a prodigious favourite with Mr. Lyle, and not less so with his daughter."

He turned away as he encountered her arch glance.

"What a marvellous fancy you have for reports this morning! I have been compelled to

protest against them once already, I now must do so again. We are friends; and if there is no shame in the question, let a friend ask it boldly, and not make a cat's paw of a gossip."

Dunrayne coloured, hesitated, and then stammered, "I know that you are particular in these points, Florence; and you might not approve."

"Ah, Dunrayne! how 'conscience doth make cowards of us all!' I will be liberal in my judgment, and so speak boldly."

"Well then, I am not to blame. Is Florence Lyle to be Lady Clanellon?"

"Never!"

Dunrayne raised his eyes in delight at her emphatic negative: he had not ventured to look up till she had spoken.

"I am glad of it. I am convinced that man is a villain."

"I think so too, and perhaps with as good reason as yourself. I have known him but one month; you have known him but one hour."

"You may smile, but I am seldom wrong in my judgment, and there are some people that one hates by instinct. I am sure he is a villain!"

"A very charitable decision on our parts; but we will have no hating, if you please. I have heard him instanced as a man to love by instinct. You ought to allow him temper at the least."

"Not I!" he replied, a little abashed at her look. "The man's mood was too unruffled to be natural; he had some point to gain, or something to conceal: a franker character would have shown the displeasure he must have felt. There are dark depths in his mind which he fears to bare to view, lest the sight should shock. Beware of a hypocrite!"

"You tried his temper sorely. I wish some others would learn self-control from him."

"It is of no use, Florence, to look at me: I could as well control the whirlwind as myself, when the fit is on me. You shake your head,

and I know what you would say: I can resolve, but I cannot perform; and this man is my abhorrence. I did try his temper, and gloried in the slight flushing of his cheek; and I had the baseness to taunt him with extravagance and gaming, when I have done the like myself,—yet I felt as much at the allusion as he could do. That is the way with me: once let the torrent loose, and I am its victim and its slave. You shall read me a lecture presently, sweet Florence; but first tell me again that you detest this man."

"I dislike and suspect him; and that is the most that we should either of us feel. Yet, to tell the truth, I cannot but admire him; and there are times when I fear him."

"Fear him, Florence!—who shall dare to harm whilst I ——"

"Put up your sword, Dunrayne, since, unhappily for us young démoiselles, the age of chivalry is past: besides, I have really nothing to fear. Do you know for certain that he games?"

"I heard it, or read it in the papers."

"Do you believe all that you hear, or read in the papers?"

"When it suits with my own fancy. The whole neighbourhood rings with your reported marriage."

"I feared as much."

"It is said that you give him every encouragement."

"That is false! I have never shown him more than the scanty civility due to my father's guest."

"Indeed! Your looks before I entered showed something beyond civility."

"In plain English, you played the honourable part of spy, and formed an incorrect judgment, as spies have done before. After long labour, Lord Clanellon had succeeded in rousing me from my usual coldness by some eloquent remarks on genius; but he was well aware that my attention was given to the subject far more than to the speaker; though I must admit

that his talent for conversation is so superior, and there is so much mind, the evidence of such acute observation, in all he says, that he can almost intellectualise the stupid, and must infallibly command the attention of the intellectual."

Dunrayne was uneasy at this praise. "He seems a dangerous personage. Why not dismiss him at once, and thus silence all reports?"

"Can a young lady say no, before she has been asked to say yes?"

"Young ladies, and Florence Lyle in particular, can explain their sentiments by manner. She would not, I am sure, wish to encourage hopes that she has resolved not to fulfil.

"Florence Lyle thanks you for the hint," she said playfully. "Her manner has ever told Lord Clanellon an unflattering tale."

"Why not speak to your father, then, if you wish his absence? He can deny you nothing."

Florence hesitated, and her look became troubled.

"You do not wish his absence!" exclaimed Dunrayne with strong symptoms of a probable relapse into his former violence.

"I do most earnestly and sincerely wish his absence!" replied Florence firmly, meeting her companion's searching look.

"Then why not tell your father so, and say that these reports are disagreeable? You know your will is law,—that a tear, a saddened look, even the shadow of a frown, would move him to your wishes; and you are no wavering character."

"I know all this; and it is the knowing this that keeps me silent. I am no waverer on other points; but where my father's wishes are concerned, I am the veriest coward living. If he ruled and commanded, as some others do, I might assert my freedom, where no higher duty interfered: but he does not so, and I am the lowliest slave beneath his tyranny of love. I was but twelve when my poor mother died. There had never been a child but me — there

had been no partition of interest or affection with another; the love of both had been concentrated in me—their lives seemed spelled in mine. I, too, had none to love but them, and cannot call to mind a harsh or grating word. I never met a frown! Living ever with, the darling of, those older than myself; whilst they bent themselves to my young powers and unformed mind, I naturally rose sooner than would one of many children to a communion with their more exalted thoughts. I was the pupil, rather than the plaything of their love. One of my mother's last acts was to place my father's hand in mine, to bless us, and to pray that through the coming years of life our hopes in earth and heaven should be the same—our love unchilled, unchanged, let the world's chances wound us as they might."

"I go," she said, "in the humble hope of being with my Heavenly Father; but let the wife's, the mother's love, linger with you, to bless and shield." And her love has lingered

with us, a blessing and a shield. When her spirit had passed above, we knelt by the cold corse, and we vowed to be as one in love; and we prayed that we might keep our vow—that no sorrow should disturb our union—no chance, no change, should cloud its beauty — no selfishness should break its holy calm — no wish divide our hearts — no pride step in to cast a shadow on our fond affection. And there has been hitherto no cloud, no shadow, on its holy beauty: its blessed calm has been unbroken! Can you then wonder that I tremble lest a change should come to dim or blight its loveliness?

"I fear my father has this match at heart. He has not said so, for he would have it of my own free will; but I can read his wishes in a thousand petty things no other eye could mark. Hitherto I have rejected as I pleased, and with his full concurrence; now, I fear that a refusal would distress him, and I shrink from this as the pampered and the prosperous shrink from

suffering. I fear to ask him, lest he should name his wishes, and I should seem to thwart them. The tear—the look—the frown, you speak of, would ensure my will; but they would give him pain, and I dare not touch upon the subject —I would rather trust to Lord Clanellon's wearying of the pursuit and ceasing to annoy me. After our conversation of this morning, I think he must resign all hope."

"I saw no such symptom," said Dunrayne; "and, in my opinion, you had better speak to Mr. Lyle at once. He would feel no pain but in the thought of paining you."

She shook her head.

"I am afraid his heart is too much in the wish."

"From personal approbation of his lordship; or only from his desire to see you a countess? There are other coronets to be obtained: Brackenbury is not a very ancient title," he said hurriedly, and as it were tryingly.

"Any coronet would be displeasing to me," remarked Florence rather coldly. "I would rather wed in my own station, and am sorry that my father should, in his love, desire otherwise. Lord Clanellon is a great favourite—indeed he sees no fault in him; and he considers himself indebted to Lord Brackenbury for some kindness in his youth: so that, without seeming to cross my father, I could scarcely refuse his lordship a chance of winning my favour, were I to touch on the point. No—let the affair take its course."

"This is ill advised. The toils may be wound firmly round you in a little time, that you might now burst with ease. Speak, Florence, I entreat you!"

"No, Dunrayne, I cannot, and I will not. Let us talk of other things!"

"Shall I again choose the subject of our discourse?" he asked between pique and jest.

"You have already chosen it," she answered,

sportively: "it was decided that I should read you a lecture."

"So you shall, Florence, for I deserve one; and your sweet tones are the only spells that calm me. Were you always with me to smile or chide, I should grow worthy of your love. Do not look coldly on me for those words; I will offend no more to-day. Now for the lecture!"

No, reader, you shall be spared the lecture, if there were one, and we will skip over the next half-hour.

"Positively, Dunrayne, you must depart," said Florence; "I have a first visit to pay, and must dress early for the dinner."

"Are you afraid that Clanellon should return and find us *tête-à-tête?*"

"I do not wish it, though you have promised to be good."

"So I will, and begin by obedience. Good-b'ye: you are a dear, kind thing, as Emma says."

"Good-b'ye! Remember, you are to be very agreeable this evening, and do nothing to disturb your father."

"I shall behave with the dignity fitting the heir of the ancient house of Aggenthorpe. *Apropos des bottes*, as I said this morning, remember, I take precedence of Clanellon, ours being the oldest title; and he is not to hand you into dinner," he said, turning round as he reached the door.

Florence laughed, though half fearful of his temper for the evening.

"I shall not be handed by a viscount when an earl is present, depend upon it. The lady whom I shall insist on Lord Clanellon's handing always sits next my father. If you elect a proper partner and offer to carve—as your father, from his sprained wrist, cannot—perhaps I may permit you to sit next me above the old married men; but you must be better than good, in return for this concession, as we merchants, ladies and gentlemen, are very critical

as to precedence, and I may chance to encounter the frowns of old and young for the permission."

"I will be better than best; so once more adieu:" and Dunrayne departed in perfect good humour.

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CHAPTER II.

"Wealth is wisdom, knowledge, power, all combined."
BYRON.

"Your dullest animals are always your greatest feeders."

"I never saw a difficult dinner-party better bothered!"
Helen.

"What mean these words?"

THE Earl of Aggenthorpe, his lady, and son, reached Atherton Hall at precisely the proper moment,—that is, they were the last arrivals; but the guests, who had just preceded them, had scarcely taken their seats before the earl and his party were announced. He had not appeared to hurry to the merchant's splendid banquet, nor had he kept him waiting; yet, as

dinner was ordered immediately on his announcement, it seemed to have been delayed only till the arrival of the great man of the party. With what trifles can pride be pleased or fretted!

Without being in the slightest degree handsome, there was a stately elegance, a lofty courtesy, about the earl when in his best mood, that suited well with his high lineage and his many noble qualities. Had Lord Aggenthorpe possessed riches to support his title, not with heartless extravagance, but with the liberal hospitality and kindly charity of an English nobleman,—or could he have subdued his pride, holding himself above the accident of fortune,—he would have been an honour and a profit to his country — beloved where he was now barely respected, admired where he was ridiculed. Of Saxon lineage, the family had once been of great importance, its head one of the magnates of the land. During the various civil wars—the most uncivil of civil things—they had lost

the greater part of their domains; and Aggenthorpe Castle, with a few acres round, was now all that remained of their ancient patrimony. Considering the Stuarts as their lawful sovereigns, and holding that the kingly will alone should rule, the Earls of Aggenthorpe thought themselves wronged and ill-treated; and, as Dunrayne had said, looked with unfriendly feelings upon those who, by grant or purchase, had become possessed of those forfeited estates which they still regarded as their domains. The present earl had been reared in this feeling. His pride, encouraged by the legends of the past, and not softened by a contact with others, from the seclusion in which he lived, was at once his besetting sin and its greatest punishment. Even his best qualities preyed upon themselves till be became an embodied mimosa, that neither the hand of friend or foe could touch but he shrunk back, pained or anticipating pain. No neighbourhood could be worse suited to such a disposition than the one in which he was compelled

to live. Had the former possessions of the family become the property of one person, there would have been but that one to dislike and avoid; and his ill-will, thus become individual, he might have been shocked at its strength, and have sought to subdue it; or had they become the property of three or four persons unconnected with trade, whom even his prejudice must have considered gentlemen, he might have become resigned to the transfer; but to have the lands of his fathers parcelled out as common land into small allotments for building—these allotments sold to retired tradesmen,—or, almost as bad in his estimation, thriving merchants or manufacturers,—was more than he ever taught himself to sustain with equanimity.

Fairport, formerly an insignificant village, was now considered one of the first commercial towns in England; whilst a few miles inland was as increasing and wealthy a manufacturing district. The neighbourhood round Aggenthorpe Castle was the favourite retreat of all

those from the seaport or inland town who had acquired sufficient wealth to retire from business or could afford a country-house. What with merchants and manufacturers, his lordship knew no peace: they thwarted—they crossed him at every turn, till his contempt for trade as an occupation, save in the very lowest class, became little short of hatred.

He would have been charitable with the little he possessed, but his pride made him shrink from his paltry alms appearing in a contrast with the profuse subscription of the wealthy merchant. Thus, when he gave, he gave alone,—scoffed at a united plan of action for the benefit of the poor as ostentation—and let his own pride go unmarked and unrebuked. He was kind and affable to the lower classes and the small tradesmen,—there could be no competition even in wealth between them and him,—whilst his stately mien, when forced into contact with the great men of commerce, was called for by the circumstances of the times—the growing spirit

of insubordination, the fearful crowding of the middling ranks upon the heels of their superiors. Thus he said, and thus again he acquitted himself of pride.

Decided—nay, stern in his resolves, looking upon the nobles as petty monarchs who should brave all and bear all for the upholding of their order, his marriage, which is but rarely the case, had accorded with his ideas of duty. Lady Aggenthorpe was of an ancient family, and had brought him twenty thousand pounds. Her manners and conduct were exactly what he considered the manners and conduct of a countess should be;—that is, they were a softened resemblance of his own, for she was one whose mind, if mind she had, would take its colouring from another: but, whilst acquiring from her lord the pride and prejudice that made his wretchedness and marred his virtues, she had neither the penetration to discover nor the power to appreciate his better qualities, impaired by disuse, smothered by pride, yet oc-

casionally bursting forth with something of their original splendour. She was incapable of sympathising with the nobler parts of his character; and if less apt to take offence, it was because she had less sensibility, rather than less haughtiness. Her two eldest daughters were fac-similes of their mother; and though their father, on the principle of the positive duty of maintaining the purity of caste, had desired the marriages which they had contracted, he would not have commanded compliance; and their own wishes had been still more decided than his. The youngest daughter, Emma, had all her father's sensibility and noble feeling, without his prejudice. She would never sell her hand for rank or wealth; and though the darling of her father's love, as Dunrayne was of his pride, Florence and her brother could not but be anxious for her future fate.

Dunranye once, in a fit of prudence, mischief, or desperation, as he said,—he could not tell which,—proposed embarking in some specula-

tion — a softened name for trade; but his father's horror was so great, that, anticipating a fit of paralysis, he rushed from the room, glad to receive the reproaches for his degeneracy through the medium of the pen. The army, the only profession for nobility in the earl's judgment, was too expensive; and thus the proud and fiery spirit of his son was compelled to inactivity—condemned to prey upon itself. Besides the expense, the earl had no interest to insure promotion; for though his hereditary feelings and prejudices engendered a lofty opinion of the king's prerogative and the fearful perils of change, thus creating a sympathy with those who then were and long had been in power, yet his pride forbade his stooping to ask; and his lofty independence prevented the pledging of his proxy, and occasionally induced him to vote in opposition. There was no meanness in his character,—he would submit to any inconvenience and privation to maintain what he considered the honour of his

house, and that not a debt might be left unpaid. He could not chaffer or cheapen,—he would not offer less, when he knew that the worth alone was asked;—the very name of bargain was an abomination. He saw clearly the trial of riches to those among whom he lived; he marked with microscopic discernment how the more the merchant gained, the more he desired;—how his whole mind and heart were absorbed in the pursuit, till gold became his God;—how business, that might once have been an irksome duty, became an almost passionate enjoyment, and thoughts and words were considered wasted if employed upon other matters. He remarked too that, whilst declaiming bitterly against the pride and exclusiveness of the titled and high-born, the same spirit of pride and exclusiveness, and with less excuse, ruled the society of merchants. The exclusive spirit of ancient rank and birth may be gilded by knowledge, elegance, and noble feeling, till it seems a thing of mind; the exclusive spirit

of half-educated and newly-acquired wealth is seen in all its native deformity. That this spirit of judging persons by what they possess, or by whom they visit, rather than by what they are, pervades every class even to the very lowest, (I doubt if beggars have it not,) is a truth that the most extravagant declaimer against the aristocracy would scarcely think of denying:—why then is it the fashion to treat of it as belonging solely to the nobility? Possibly the highest class are freer from it than the middling: as cowards are the greatest tyrants, so the doubtful in station are the most touchy as to precedence. Let us seek to eradicate the spirit in ourselves and others, to whatever class we may belong.

Even under the most favourable dispositions and circumstances, men raised by their industry and success in trade to the fortunes, but rarely to the manners, of gentlemen, cannot be the most desirable neighbours to a nobleman of ancient descent. If that nobleman has

wealth to maintain the state expected from his rank, so that rivalry is beyond a hope; there may be friendly and neighbourly feeling, but, generally speaking, little sympathy between them in the generation of the founder of the new family, in thoughts, pursuits, or manners. He who is seeking to spend his fortune with propriety can hold little in common with him who is seeking to make his fortune with celerity. The one has more time, and probably more inclination, to improve and enlighten his mind; and the occupation of making money, though acknowledged as necessary and lawful, is considered as low and common-place when weighed by his more exalted and refined ideas. The other, absorbed in plain matters-of-fact, and with neither time nor inclination for what he considers superfluous knowledge, or dangerous reveries, is apt to think his more intellectual neighbour an idle pleasure-seeker, or a useless visionary. They may interchange visits and acts of kindness, but there can be little real sympathy between them.

Of course these remarks principally apply to the founders of families, the original merchants of a by-gone day: in the present times of enlightenment, their children receive the best of educations, — at least, as good as those of a higher rank; — and there are many instances where the minds and manners of parvenus need shrink from no comparison with the most exalted in the land. We may honour ancient birth; but virtue, genius, and even elegance, are bounded to no station. Lord Aggenthorpe saw every defect in those around him, not the smallest trait escaped him; but he would not see that his own pride and sensitiveness to fancied slight, and his contempt for honest industry, were to the full as blameable. He saw the worst in others, he saw only the best in himself. That we would but judge others as leniently as we judge ourselves! — that we would but mark our own failings as critically and minutely as we mark those of our neighbours! Should we not then be more charitable? And what gives us so clear an insight into the defects of

others, but that the seeds of the same defects are in our own bosoms, and we know them from their resemblance, though we own it not? And what makes us so wroth against them, but that they cross our interests, encounter our defects, and shock and thwart us in our onward path? Certainly the neighbourhood of Fairport was the most unfavourable neighbourhood in which Lord Aggenthorpe, or any resembling him in circumstances or opinion, could have been placed. He had to endure the horrors of a mental martyrdom without its consolations—a daily torture with scarcely the consciousness of being justified in suffering; and this without the hope of relief, for the castle could not be abandoned, and few would rent an enormous house with a paltry domain;—nor was it every one to whom his lordship would have let it.

Aggenthorpe Castle the country-box of a merchant or manufacturer! The old portraits would have descended from their frames! His buried ancestors would have burst from their

graves! He himself could not have survived the profanation!

It may be wondered, with these ideas, how any friendly intercourse could subsist between the earl's family and that of Mr. Lyle, particularly as Atherton being the largest estate in the neighbourhood, and within sight of the castle, its owners might be supposed to excite a double portion of contempt or hatred. Such was the feeling at one time; but the intercourse had begun between the young people, and Florence ever showed such respect and regard for the earl, and so sincerely admired the castle and its ancient glories — listened so patiently, indeed with so much pleasure, to the old legends and deeds of arms—and was so fond of Emma and Dunrayne, and they were so fond of her, that she soon became a welcome visitor; and though the earl would have been angry and denied it had any other said it—nay, scarcely admitted the thought to himself, — it is possible, that had Florence so willed and Dunrayne pleaded

strongly, the merchant's daughter might have become the bride of the heir of Aggenthorpe. So much did her calm and dignified manner please him, that very trifling evidence would have sufficed to convince him that she was a scion of nobility, changed in her cradle.

As Dunrayne had said, the acquaintance had commenced by Florence presenting Emma with some fruit and flowers which she had admired. Dunrayne, too proud to accept a gratuitous obligation, lauded so highly the wonders of the castle, and the beauty of his guinea-pigs, promising to send her one of the latter, that Florence was dying with childish curiosity to behold them; and when, actuated by the same feeling as his son, the earl invited her to come and see these wonders, her mother could scarcely have withstood her pleadings had she been so inclined. But Mrs. Lyle was not so inclined. With elegant manners, and an exalted and highly-cultivated mind,—respecting and feeling for the earl, yet not blind to his defects,—

she was not sorry that Florence should form an acquaintance with his daughter.

The earl was so much pleased with what he called the spirited sweetness of Florence, (for a slight awe of his lordship kept her gaiety in check,) and her proper respect for rank, that the children became frequent visitors, and in due time, thanks to the cautious delicacy of Mrs. Lyle, the elders were on friendly terms, and her death sincerely regretted. If not quite so great a favourite as his wife and daughter, Mr. Lyle was held in higher estimation than any of his brother merchants. Though from a deficiency in the delicate tact of his wife, (supplied by good feeling on great occasions,) he sometimes wounded the earl in trifles, his admiration of rank, not concealed by an occasional denial of such a feeling—his gratitude for some slight patronage afforded by the earl to some young man in whom he was interested—the promptness and delicacy with which through Florence he offered a loan on

the occasion of Dunrayne's extravagance, making it appear as a profitable investment to himself—and his many good qualities, induced the earl to look upon him as a friend, and to pardon his removal to the envied Atherton ; an event which occurred some years after the death of Mrs. Lyle.

The earl would have been shocked and amazed had he been accused of having felt or shown a rivalry in respect to the merchant, and yet one act of his life could be accounted for on no other principle,—and this was sending Lady Emma Dunrayne to the same expensive school as Florence Lyle. Lord Aggenthorpe averred that he yielded to the wishes of his child : it might be so,—we will not dive too deeply into his motives; and as we calculate that all our readers must understand the earl's character by this time, and be as weary of its analysis as ourselves, and as his lordship may take offence if delayed longer in the ante-room, we will throw open the folding doors and introduce him into the great saloon.

The introduction has taken place; the earl and countess have saluted the assembled party with becoming dignity; the merchant and his daughter have welcomed them with due warmth and respect, inquiring after the sprained wrist; Mr. Lyle has handed the countess in to dinner, who has graciously signified her pleasure in sitting next him; the earl has done the like by Florence; and Dunrayne taking *le pas* of Clanellon, who, to do him justice, never attempted to dispute it, and, acting on her hint, has secured the station on her left hand. The difficult arrangement of seats and precedence has been completed—though, truth compels us to own, not to the satisfaction of all—grace has been said, and the increasing clatter of knives and forks, and the decreasing clatter of tongues, proves the banquet to have begun; apparently a serious affair to many of the guests—as much a matter of business as inspecting or discounting bills, or speculating on the rise and fall of shares and stocks. The dinner and its ad-

juncts harmonised, as Clanellon admitted, with all that he had seen at Atherton: poetically speaking, it exhibited a subdued gorgeousness, rich, plentiful, but not ostentatious,—the profusion of the father, amended by the simplicity of the daughter.

"Turtle! venison! and all that is delicious! I will be a merchant or an alderman," said Dunrayne, with that careless manner and indifferent tone, in which secrets may be discussed in safety at a crowded dinner, taking advantage of the deafness of his next neighbour and his father's playing the courteous to Mrs. Hulton. "Look at Mr. Sibthorp! his whole soul, if he has one, is in that delicious *morceau* before him. The cares of this world are all forgotten, sorrow is but a visionary's dream. What a blessing to be so absorbed! Oh that I had but a turtle crawl or a deer pen! I must end as I began—I will be a merchant or an alderman!"

"You may spare yourself the degradation," replied Florence between sport and gravity, after a glance at the huge mass of flesh Dunrayne had pointed out to her notice, and who, in his complete absorption in the act of eating, scarcely appeared less material or more intellectual than a blubber-fish — that object of hatred to fishermen. "You may luxuriate in the absorption of eating as you desire, and still remain a lord. Have you forgotten Lord Welpool? Mr. Sibthorp is but an inferior satellite to his lordship."

"Ha, Florence! have you so much *esprit de corps?* I did not suspect this."

"Yes, a great deal of *esprit de corps.* I am becoming touchy on the matter of merchantism, so behave with civility."

Dunrayne laughed.

"Well then, whilst this remove is executing— admirably, I admit, (I am sure you lecture your poor servants as you do me, they are so perfect,)

as human voices are again beginning to be heard, let us listen that I may profit by the discourse of your intellectual merchants."

"Do my lectures always produce perfection?" asked Florence archly.

"Worse than treason to have a doubt: but hush—

'The merchant talks, and talks of bonds!'

"What sort of a person is Mr. Oakley?" asked Mr. Hazel, who had not been long in the neighbourhood.

"Oh, he is a good man!" replied Mr. Milford. "He has fifty thousand pounds for speculation, besides his regular business."

"Has he indeed? Well, I did not think so highly of him; but then I have only seen him once. Mr. Hanson I considered a warm man."

"Yes, Hanson is really a good man, and very clever," replied Mr. Milford. "He gives his daughters thirty thousand apiece; and his sons will be rich enough to stand for counties, only they will not be such fools. And there

is Carwell, you must get acquainted with him; a most worthy man! really an excellent man! Not one who lives from hand to mouth; he could put down a hundred thousand within twelve hours."

"Ay! I always heard he was a good man: and there is a Wilkins, is not there—a very worthy character?"

"Which? There are two."

"Robert Wilkins, I think."

"A poor creature indeed! never could make anything of business—had not head for it—was always reading, and now has written some history or other; not Whittington's—he would never be Lord Mayor of London. He is one of the idle, worthless set of fellows, who are of no use in the world. His cousin offered to take him into partnership if he would give up reading; but the fool refused, and there he is living on odds and ends in a doubtful sort of way upon eight hundred a year, with a wife and one child, and quite contented, I believe. I

understand there was madness on the mother's side. You must mean the cousin—no one could have said any good of him; but Samuel Wilkins is a very good man, and a useful member of society. I suppose his income is nearly ten thousand a year; and he is always striving to make more. Samuel Wilkins is an excellent fellow! a good warm man!"

"What a poor, wicked, unhanged wretch am I! without even eight hundred odds and ends to live upon," said Dunrayne in pretended horror.

"Who doubted it?" replied Florence playfully, yet with a kind and sisterly gentleness, fearing lest such remark should pain him. On the contrary, the littleness of these possessors of the wealth he lacked seemed rather to console him.

"Setting my wickedness aside as *une affaire décidée*, what says your *esprit de corps*?"

"Has your lordship never heard your equals in rank estimate the worth of others by as

false a scale?—by their knowledge of horse-flesh, as you elegantly term it; an acquaintance with the genealogies of horses and dogs; a fashionable dress or address; money, as our merchants do; and even worse or meaner things?"

"Heyday, Florence! why, your *esprit de corps* is a reality; and yet, if any other said it, I should call them libellers."

"Have I said more than the truth, Dunrayne?"

"Perhaps not! but I am at deadly war with trade, as you know. Mr. Lyle and his daughter I consider of a distinct class, a newly-discovered genus. But do you mean to put merchant against noble for intellectual acquirements and liberal ideas, and that too after the specimen which you have just heard?"

"That would be rather a delicate point of dispute, considering our respective situations—it might become personal: our safest plan will be, like the Athenian generals of old, to

assign the second station in the scale of intellectual acquirements and liberal ideas to the class of independent gentlemen, neither noblemen nor merchants, leaving the first unclaimed, or at least unappropriated. One thing I must protest against,—the judging us in general from the opinions of a few of the least enlightened individuals."

"What an admirable diplomatist you would make! so excellent in disposing of difficult questions!" said the laughing Dunrayne. "But how can you talk of us, thus identifying yourself with the house of Sibthorp, Hazel, and Milford? I never look on you as a merchant's daughter."

"And I am too proud of the name to disclaim it. There must be grades in society, and I would have those grades maintained, not with galling pride and bitter heart-burning, but with courteous independence on one side, and liberal consideration on the other. I would not have one mark of the respect due to supe-

rior rank omitted; but, setting aside the distinctions of society necessary in a civilised state, the merchant stands as high—it may be higher—in the scale of being than the peer. Were the race of merchants to be swept away by the sudden freak of some commerce-hating fairy, your lordship, I suspect, would own our utility; whereas, should ultra radicalism take footing in the fairy corps, and Oberon decree the demolition of nobility, I suspect that we could exist without you; though I am still more strongly convinced that but few years would pass without the creation of a new peerage. Men, judging of them in the mass, have a taste for distinctions;—those children of a larger growth love baubles quite as much as those of lesser size. Wealth is power, it has been said, as well as learning; and to a certain extent the saying is correct. The feudal rule, which, bold baron's descendant as you are, you will not defend even for an infant society, fell by the riches gained through trade: wealthy burghers bought their

freedom, and knew how to maintain it; and to commerce we stand principally indebted for increasing civilisation, and the friendly feeling now advancing between the separate portions of the brotherhood of man. Science and literature are little less her debtors, indirectly, if not directly. Commerce tracked the ocean and discovered lands still lying in savage desolation; thus lighting up the path of science, and spreading wide the blessings of revealed religion."

"What an eloquent defence, Florence! you must have some splendid merchant's clerk in your mind's eye."

Florence turned to give an order to the servant behind her chair, and Dunrayne continued.

"You are become a perfect utilitarian!"

"Only in my most sober moods, and then but in theory. It would have shown a greater practical knowledge, if, instead of entering on

this discussion, I had appealed to the turtle and other foreign delicacies you so much admire, as the most eloquent defence that could be made for commerce."

"That allusion insures your victory. Before, I had some thoughts of mentioning a few of the horrors which the ignorant attribute to commerce; the wrongs of the red man and the black man,—ay, and the white man too."

"True! every picture *selon la nature* has dark shades as well as brilliant lights; but I had no retaining fee on the other side. There is no station without its trials and temptations — its sorrows and its joys, and all fulfil the purpose of their being who seek to perform the duties that belong to each."

"A very proper moral conclusion!" said Dunrayne gaily; "but Mr. Sibthorp condescends to speak, and I must listen, — I am such a passionate admirer of eloquence."

"I wish you would show some charity towards my guests, at least, as long as they continue such."

A look of mischievous enjoyment was his reply.

"Will you please to take a glass of wine, Miss, now that I have done the venison?" said Mr. Sibthorp to Florence, nearly the length of the long table intervening between them.

Florence bowed her acquiescence with proper gravity, in spite of Dunrayne's light laugh.

"What were you saying of Robert Wilkins this morning, Mr. Sibthorp?" inquired a gentleman near him.

"I said he was a fool," replied Mr. Sibthorp, who was truly great in quantity if not in quality — in person if not in mind, speaking with slow distinctness. "He did not know the price of stocks though he had been reading the paper the last hour; and when I asked what he had been spelling then, he talked some nonsense about those Greeks, that no one

knows nothing of. 'Who ever heard of them till they wanted a loan? And what's the use of their victory to us, sir?' says I; 'will it fill our pockets? I like a something that I can touch and see.' How he stared, and then walked away, looking ashamed. 'Tis a poor, mean, silly fellow! has not sense to make a fortune, but sits at home making books. What good can books do, I should like to know?" Here the speaker sank back in his chair exhausted with his long and indignant speech.

"One of us! a very worthy man, that Mr. Sibthorp! a good man! a most excellent man! Why, he can give his daughter fifty thousand pounds! His is the second house in Fairport! He stands next to Mr. Lyle! He really is a good man!" said the laughing Dunrayne to Florence.

"I must not allow you to give such a character of my friend Robert Wilkins without taking up his defence," observed Mr. Hulton. "A more honourable and truly worthy

young man can scarce be found. I have known him from a boy,—I have traced him through every stage of life, and have ever held him up as a model to my sons. If his fortune is but moderate in our estimation, he is more contented with its moderation than, I fear, are many of us with our superfluity, still toiling on for more. We anticipate rest and content at some distant day, which with many never arrives: he enjoys rest and content in the present, that is his already. His talents of the highest order, and his natural tastes, lead him to literature; and he has given to the world more than one useful and beautiful work. I am sure we are not so illiberal as to brand a man with folly, simply because with a fortune sufficient for his wants, he declines harassing himself with the cares and anxieties of commerce. Who are greater benefactors than those who, making genius the blessing it was intended to be, enlighten the mind, elevate the soul, and purify the heart, teaching us how best to show our love to our

Maker and our brethren? Such are real benefactors to their race! We owe a man more for teaching us to think, and think aright, than for freighting our ships with his crops, or filling his warehouses with our manufactures. The one assists us in providing for the wants of the perishable body; the other aids us in supplying the pinings of the mind—the longings of the imperishable soul."

"Enlighten — elevated—the pinings of the mind—the longings of the soul," growled out Mr. Sibthorp with an appearance of great effort. "All folly and nonsense! what silly girls talk of. What good do they do? they won't fill our pockets, or provide a good dinner, I take it. Give me what will make money. Our fathers did very well without these things. Teach a man to put two to two, and two to that, and take care he ain't cheated, and there 's no use in more learning, as I see. All the rest is like nonsense about high birth. What is the use of having grandfathers and

great-grandfathers, if they did not leave you a guinea? Make your own fortune, and cut your father if he had nothing."

"Here we shall be at issue again, Mr. Sibthorp," said Mr. Hulton quickly, feeling for Lord Aggenthorpe from a knowledge of his sensitiveness, and anxious to save him from pain though scarcely even on bowing acquaintance. "My grandfather began life in a small huckster's shop, consequently I have no birth to boast of; yet I can fully understand how the remembrance of the virtues of a long line of ancestors may elevate their descendants to a higher sense of their duties. My great-grandfather may have been a very worthy man, but as his biography has not been preserved, I can neither profit by his example, nor fear to degrade a name to which no honour is attached. I am sure I should have been very proud of a long line of ancestors, merchant as I am."

"Folly! nonsense!—give me gold!" growled out Mr. Sibthorp in a dull, heavy tone, and

with a still heavier look,—a striking contrast to the animated speech and countenance of Mr. Hulton.

It would have been too great an exertion to say more.

"Thank you, Mr. Hulton, for this defence of our order and correct statement of our feelings," said Mr. Lyle. "Whilst we by no means despise wealth, we are not such mere money-making machines, without thought or feeling, as Mr. Sibthorp would describe us, and we have no wish to depreciate others. Will you take champagne, my lord?" addressing the earl to conclude the conversation.

The earl accepted the invitation with graciousness, though with a flushed cheek, and then entered into a more than polite conversation with Mrs. Hulton. Florence looked at Dunrayne.

"I understand your triumphant glance," he remarked with feeling. "If I have hitherto misjudged your order, as you call it, I shall

do so no more. Mr. Lyle and Mr. Hulton might redeem the character of a whole race of rogues or fools; yet I have several times annoyed the latter and mystified his daughter: I am more ashamed than I should like to own. As for that dull, gormandising lump of flesh, I shall write him down in my dictionary as a mercantile walrus—an animal that eats, drinks, and sleeps; — a zoophite — the connecting link between animate and inanimate nature—a thing to be tormented without shame or remorse. No remonstrance or rebuke, Miss Lyle! I spare the mental nonentity to-night, because I promised to be good; after that, woe to him and his whole race!—the truce lasts no longer. I rather suspect Viscount Clanellon also deserves my wrath. If I rightly interpreted the expression of his features, he found pleasure in that creature's defamation of birth, forgetting, in his malice, that the cap would fit more heads than one. Yet he looks all innocence now, and too well satisfied with his neighbour

to grudge me my station. As to the fair Julia, I never saw her more lovely and enchanting, particularly when she blushes and looks down. There is more soul about her than usual, as if some newly-awakened feeling was letting in a fresh light upon her mind,—a decided case, as the doctors say."

Florence looked at those of whom he spoke, and admitted his remarks were not without foundation. She had bent slightly forward to obtain a better view, and before her eyes were withdrawn, Clanellon, raising his, met her rather anxious gaze, and with one of those fascinating smiles which gave to his words, commonplace as they might be, the power of a spell, he asked her to take wine. She coloured slightly whilst bowing her acquiescence. His bow ere his lips touched the wine had something of graceful, lover-like assurance; at least, so thought the merchant's daughter, and perhaps some others: her answering bend was as chilling as bend could be. When the ceremony was

completed, she felt that she was annoyed, and that Dunrayne's eyes were fixed upon her.

"Has the servant placed the corner dish where the side one should be? for your look is anxious and troubled," he observed with anything but a pleasing manner.

"He has placed the curry on the wrong side," she replied, resuming her composure."

"I was sure something had gone wrong, though I believed you above the littleness of fretting for the accidents of the table."

"I have not the great mind for which you give me credit; but I am above seeking to wound another, who may have cause for care that I know not of."

"True! who can guess a woman's troubles? She abuses one moment what she sighs to possess the next."

"Since you cannot read our minds, you should not judge our conduct;—since you cannot tell for what we sigh, you should not deem us subject to caprice. You promised to be good;—play civil to the lady next you."

"You are not wont to be changeable, Florence, nor to yield to pique."

"I am neither piqued nor changeable: do as I bid you!"

Her smile contented him, and he turned to his deaf neighbour.

"Will you try that curry, Mr. Ashton?" asked Mr. Lyle. "We poor merchants can scarcely hope to please the palates of luxurious nabobs, but I believe this is intended as a poor copy of what you gave us at your house."

The gentleman addressed sat on the other side of Miss Desmond, and he and Clanellon had conversed together both before and during dinner. Each thought that he had fathomed the other; yet there might be depths in each which neither had explored.

Mr. Ashton was not a person to pass unobserved in any company; for, though rather silent and reserved, the few sentences to which his conversation on general occasions was limited, were sufficient to tell the discriminating hear-

er that he was a man of mind, if not of passion. Never above the middle size, a heavy stoop made him appear short; whilst a black patch over one eye, and a broad seam across the right cheek, the effect of a sabre-cut, so much disfigured him, that none could say with certainty what his youthful appearance might have been. The lines on his brow were deeply traced, and his hair was a decided grey; but it had the fulness of middle age; and a doubt might arise whether its silver hue, the stoop, and the deep lines, were not the effects of care and suffering, more than years. His voice and manner were usually equable, even to monotony, which many attributed to his long residence in the East.—"Most Indians were indolent: look at Mr. Blackmore and others."

Mr. Blackmore, who chanced to be seated nearly opposite Mr. Ashton, had indeed all the indolence and languor generally produced by long residence in a warm climate; so much so, that he could rarely be accused of words or acts not absolutely requisite; and when compelled

to converse, his conversation resembled an index, or an epitome of chapters,—the little words being omitted, and the listener hearing nothing but desultory heads of a discourse, without any connecting links. Mr. Blackmore was indolent in mind and body; you could not look at him, you could not listen to him, and yet doubt it.

The opinion of Mr. Ashton was by no means so decided. His quietude scarcely appeared the mere indolence of climate or of natural disposition; it looked more like the languor succeeding over-excitement,—the repose of strength rather than the weariness of weakness. What made this more probable was, that whilst all owned him to be a sensible, and many felt him to be a superior man, this general opinion was rather founded on an idea of what he could say and do, than on what he had said or done.

Interested in developing his character, from no other reason that appeared than the conversation overheard in the morning between Mr.

Lyle and his daughter, Clanellon had, by some little manœuvring, obtained a station near him; and there had been peculiarities in Mr. Ashton's demeanour before and at dinner sufficient to urge him to more critical observation. Mr. Lyle had said truly that the Indian's eyes ever followed Florence when in her society, and Clanellon observed besides that he sought to converse with her; and then his voice had an earnest softness which it boasted at no other time, whilst during her conversation with Dunrayne at dinner he had watched her with a look of anxious curiosity.

Could this old Eastern, with his scar and his patch, and his bowed and withered figure, and his deep-lined brow, and his silver hair—could he really hope to wed with the young, and the courted, and the lovely, as Florence had playfully hinted in the morning? His marked attention looked something like it; and pleasant, sensible, and well-informed, he decidedly was. "No fool like an old fool!" thought

Clanellon; but his comment on the proverb was a smile of contempt, not a frown of displeasure. Though Florence showed him high consideration, he did not dread him as a rival.

Nor did the demeanour maintained by Mr. Ashton and Mr. Lyle towards each other escape the keen remark of Clanellon; but no proverb could account for this to his satisfaction. If Mr. Ashton's tone was softer to Florence than to any other;—if his eye dwelt delighted on her beauty, his sallow cheek seeming to catch a glow from its radiance—his heart to expand in her loveliness;—his tone was harsher, sterner to her father than to any other gentleman—his answers more brief, showing at times something like impatience of his presumption in addressing him; whilst, if Mr. Lyle endeavoured to continue the conversation, which he rarely did, the Indian's voice became more deep, his eye shot forth a fiercer light, and you could not but fancy that he was with difficulty suppressing some emotion stronger than impa-

tience, and that some harrowing memory of the fearful past was stirring up a tempest of the mind which could scarcely be restrained.

How this could be was little less difficult to solve than a meaningless enigma: perhaps it was nothing more. Mr. Ashton had rented Ryeburns not four months, and Mr. Lyle met him at Mr. Hulton's, to whom Ryeburns belonged, a few days after his arrival. Mr. Lyle said they had never met before—Mr. Ashton did not assert that they had. There had been no quarrel, no contention between them—not even a difference of opinion, for on politics and many other points they thought much alike: besides, there had been no great talking between them, and the stranger's manner was the same, or, if anything, more awing, on his first introduction than since his acquaintance. Mr. Lyle spoke of him in public as a sensible, pleasant man; but such an acute observer as Channellon saw that he was not at ease in his presence: that his look, when he encountered the Indian's,

was not steady; it was no longer the frank, open look of honest and kind intentions; he seemed to shrink beneath some mysterious power held over him by the stranger;—mysterious indeed, since he could in no way account for this feeling, hardly owned it to himself—certainly admitted it to no other.

Mr. Lyle would have been shocked and amazed had any one accused him of rivalry—a seeking to outvie others, and would have boldly denied the charge.

"Of whom am I jealous? of Hulton? or Hazel? or Milford?" No; Mr. Lyle was jealous of none of these: his superior wealth was universally acknowledged;—his house was admitted on all hands to be the first at present in Fairport,—equal to, greater than many in the metropolis. Absolute superiority feels no jealousy—there can be no rivalry to awaken its fears. But there was one rising rapidly in wealth and esteem, as a mere merchant, towards whom Mr. Lyle was not quite so inno-

cent of rivalry as towards the others—and that was Mr. Sibthorp. Not long settled in the neighbourhood, the wealth of a rich uncle, whose heir he had become, joined to what he had himself acquired by his knowledge of business and some lucky speculations, caused many to consider him as second only to Mr. Lyle in riches then, and less liberal in every way, save in the expenses of the table, many thought that at some future time he would be the wealthiest man in Fairport. Mr. Lyle knew all this; but the low character of the man in every point but business — his coarse manners and illiberal opinions, whilst they placed them in frequent and unpleasant opposition, lessened the dread of present rivalry; but should Mr. Lyle by any accident descend in the scale of wealth, the rivalry might then break forth in sufficient strength to convince even himself of its existence. If he must have a superior in Fairport, Mr. Lyle would rather it should be any other than the coarse-minded Sibthorp.

We have already alluded to Mr. Lyle's admiration of rank, and his wish to be connected with it—a weakness he sought to veil from himself and others by a pretended depreciation of nobility, and a declaration of his own low origin; but his regard for Lord Aggenthorpe was unstained by vanity—his regret for his reduced fortunes sincere; and though anxious when favoured by his company to have all things handsome to do him honour, no thought of rivalry or ostentation tainted his honest and friendly feelings. This was not the case with Mr. Ashton. Unable to account for that gentleman's extraordinary manner, and hearing wonderful, and probably exaggerated accounts of his wealth, he imbibed the idea that the Indian was inclined to vie with him, if not in general magnificence, at least in some points where his foreign acquisitions, the splendid baubles of the East, might afford him a hope of success. It was this jealousy, he supposed, which made his scrutiny so keen—his speech so brief;

it was this conviction which made Mr. Lyle almost nervously anxious, when he was present, that all things should be point device. He would have procured delicacies at any expense to escape his censure, which, he felt by intuition, would be hard to be endured,—or to excite his admiration, though that admiration would be unexpressed, or at most scantily afforded, and this more particularly in anything connected in the most remote degree with India—the very point in which he could be less expected to excel.

How much greater trouble do we often take to hide a defect than to exhibit a charm! or, what is far more material, to acquire a virtue.

His unconcealed admiration of Florence softened the father's heart towards him, and qualified his opinion: still, perfectly at ease in his society he never was, or could be. There was a something mysterious about him; he rarely talked of friends, never of relations; and

Mr. Lyle, frank himself, hated mystery,—he never felt comfortable when in contact with it, he said. Thus, even when he only asked Mr. Ashton to take curry, there was, to Clanellon's quick ear, a nervous anxiety distinct from his usually open manner of address.

"Thank you, Mr. Lyle; but we East Indians are not so luxurious as you would make it appear: a glass of cold water, of which you think nothing, would on the burning plains of India be a present worthy of a king. There are toils and hardships in those scorching climes of which you poor merchants, as you call yourselves, know nothing;—sufferings only to be surpassed by the ever-gnawing consciousness of crime, or the wasting of the blighted heart."

Mr. Lyle turned away involuntarily from the burning look of the speaker, whose quivering lip seemed to proclaim himself the bearer of the sufferings he had named, in part, if not entirely. There had appeared nothing in Mr.

Lyle's words to warrant such a reply, and those who remarked it concluded some accidental circumstance had recalled a scene of former suffering to his mind. His reply confirmed Florence in her conviction that the story of his life would be no common tale; but her cheek flushed, that such looks and tones should be addressed to her father; and though she spoke to Mr. Ashton to draw off observation from the effect which his words had produced, her displeasure was evident.

"Though a dish of curry may not be as acceptable beneath the chilly sky of England as a glass of water on the burning plains of India, still I must second my father's wish that you should try it. I visited the housekeeper's room myself to secure attention to the receipt, so my credit is a little at stake."

"Did you really take that trouble for an old and friendless wanderer like myself?" he inquired eagerly, his burning glance melting into softness, his tone modulated to affection.

"It was my father's wish that I should ensure its excellence, knowing you to be an invalid, and that a curry is your favourite dish," she replied more coldly, for his sudden eagerness was strange, and unpleasant, as attracting observation.

"I thank your father for his kindness—all his kindness," was his answer, with what Clanellon thought barely repressed bitterness, though others understood him to speak politely.

"Your thanks are due to Florence, however she may disclaim them. I only expressed a wish, but she had already looked to its execution. My child thinks of the pleasure and happiness of all;" and the father's face lighted up with the beauty of the heart, as he looked towards his daughter.

"Yes; she brings light and happiness to all—her love is as a shield to those on whom it is bestowed," said Mr. Ashton abruptly: then, as if aware, from encountering wondering looks, that his emotion was out of place, he continued

more calmly, "I have also to thank you, Miss Lyle, for those violets you sent me."

"Violets, Florence, to Mr. Ashton!" exclaimed her father in surprise. "Why did not you send him that Indian plant now in bloom?—I forget its name."

"Miss Lyle knew better how to please my simple tastes: I prefer the violet to all other plants—it is the charmed flower of memory," said Mr. Ashton still more abruptly than before.

Mr. Lyle turned on him a quick and searching glance, such as he rarely turned on any; and then, as the eyes of the Indian and the merchant encountered, the latter looked away with a changing cheek. Could the violet be to him also the charmed flower of memory?

The dinner proceeded:—Clanellon again engaged Mr. Ashton in conversation; the host and his daughter paid attention to all; those who came to eat, looking upon eating as an act of business, were more than satisfied with the

merits of the cook and the excellence of the wines; Mr. Ashton pronounced the curry inimitable!—the young gentlemen did their best to play the agreeable to the young ladies, who, on their parts, tried their utmost to be amused; the earl and countess were all graciousness; and a parvenu, giving his first dinner to the best part of the House of Peers, or the most exclusive of the exclusives, might have been contented with the satisfaction produced by this banquet. The turtle, turbot, and venison had been exquisite: let these be excellent, and, your company thus once put in good humour, you need not tremble at a few after-*contretems;* not that on this occasion there were any *contretems.*

The dessert, to use the expression of one of the guests, was as praiseworthy as the dinner.

"Do select some of those grapes, Florence, and send them to Mr. Ashton,—they are what he spoke of the other day," said her father, after the countess had been duly helped.

This little manœuvre of vanity succeeded to his wishes; the grapes were declared to be some of the most beautiful ever seen—some of the most delicious ever tasted; and Mr. Lyle gained the praise he sought, without subjecting himself to the equivocal replies of his guest.

"You seem amused," remarked Florence to Dunrayne.

"Amused and edified. Listen and be the same."

Florence did listen, and she too was amused. The more important point of eating being settled, conversation had become more general, and the din of tongues out-Babled the before Babel din of knives and forks. The hum of so many voices was too confusing to allow of catching a connected conversation; but above and through the hurly-burly could be distinguished the words, "debtor and creditor; consignment and connexion; mortgagers and mortgagees; principal and interest; investments, railroads, docks, and canals; bulls and bears;

mines, loans, and stocks; bills, bonds, and debentures."

"Pity me, Florence! The torture of Tantalus was nothing to mine: he was only condemned to a constant bodily thirst—a longing for the water round him; I am condemned to a mental thirst—a longing for the riches which environ me. It is just the same in the town, or on the roads: meet them when you will, you overhear them conversing on wealth, its cares or its joys. I am like one of the starving wretches in the Tempest,—the splendid banquet is before me, but I may not taste."

"They did taste at length," said Florence in playful kindness, for his speech had been a mingling of gaiety and gravity — of jest and bitterness. "I will leave you to take a lesson in the art of money-making, undisturbed by the presence of us ladies. You hear of gold, and you see smiles:—if you wish to believe all happy, it may be well that you cannot look within. A pursuit and an active mind are

blessings; but a heart sated or ever craving is no fitting object of envy, and few seek or feel content. Please to behave well when I am no longer here to call you to order."

"Depend upon me! I will defer tormenting Clanellon till you can witness the sport," he whispered as she passed him to leave the room.

CHAPTER III.

" Now look, and tell me what thou seest?"
" A crowd of all ages, sexes, and degrees,
Methinks all whom I know; and, oh, rare sport!
The foibles and the faults of each are writ
Upon his brow; and each one reads the words
Traced on his neighbour's front, and laughs aside;
And yet not one of all suspects the tale
Burnt in upon his own. 'Tis a strange world!
Furnishing rich mirth to the light-hearted,—
Matter whereat to shake the head to those
Of graver mould—the sages of the earth!
I could moralise upon man's blindness
Till he who moralised and he who heard
Should grow a-weary. But look you! there is one
Who hath more faults and foibles writ upon
The brow than any other there, and yet
None laughs so loudly, and none reads so clearly
The branded lines upon his fellow's front,
As though his own were smooth and fair, without a mark:
Oh rare excess of blindness! Ha! ha! now I must laugh!

The features of this one, and this alone,
Are strangers to mine eye. Who may it be?"
"He who asks the question!
Oh rare excess of blindness! Ha! ha! now I must laugh."

"Take it!
Claim what thou wilt, I will redeem my pledge."

"And is he gone?"

BYRON.

"IT would be quite as well if the Countess of Aggenthorpe did not give herself such airs," remarked Mrs. Sibthorp to some other ladies who had strolled with her into the conservatory. "I have no patience with such pride. She keeps away from us as if we were burrs that would stick to her if she once came near us. She need not be alarmed—I am sure I have no wish for her company. But I do not see why she should think herself so much above us: I suppose we all came from Adam, and it was all chance that she was the daughter and wife of an earl. And what good does her title

do her? Why, she can't afford to give a dinner more than twice in a year. And that gown of hers,—I hear she has had it these four years. I met her in Taplin's shop last week, who showed her a very handsome dress, the only one in Fairport. She pretended that she did not like it, but I knew better—she could not afford it. So I said, 'Put it into my carriage, Mr. Taplin: I do not care for the price.' I saw that she coloured, and I was glad of it: I have no idea of people being fine and exclusive, as they call it, and not visiting. A rich merchant's wife is as good as a poor countess, any day.

"I can't say that I think such airs becoming," said Mrs. Hazel, chiming in for once with Mrs. Sibthorp, though, generally speaking, as her coachman said, 'she and his missus did not draw well together.' "They may talk of rank and station, and all that, but I agree with you—a rich merchant's wife is fit company for any one."

"She seems mightily taken up with Miss

Lyle and Mrs. Hulton, and will scarcely speak to any one else. I see nothing in either of them, I am sure. Mrs. Hulton is a very bad dresser," glancing with complacency at the glaring colours and over-ornament of her own dress. "Besides, I think her very prosy and stupid,—talking about books, and doing good, and schools, and such things. I have neither time nor money for such nonsense, and the poor are always so ungrateful. I sent them some soup in the winter,made after my own receipt—an excellent one, not half as expensive as most—and I hear they had the impudence to say that it was scarcely worth taking home. Really the lower orders are come to such a pass, there is no bearing with them. It is a sad mistake some people going to visit them in their cottages—it makes them above themselves : if they must advise them, let them send for them—there should be some distinction maintained between the ranks of society. Then as for Miss Lyle, I see nothing so particular in her. The

features may be fine, but she has no expression my son says,—and she is so cold and proud, especially to the gentlemen, that she is not at all a favourite with the young men. My Jemima is as much admired again—so much animation!" turning to a pert-looking girl, with full red cheeks, little black eyes, and *un nez retroussé*, not to call it by its plain English name. Miss Jemima Sibthorp was a flirt—a point no one could doubt who marked the tossing of her head and her incessant giggle. "To be sure, Miss Lyle," she continued, "does not set herself off by dress,—she always chooses such quiet colours, and has so little ornament. Her maid says that her father is constantly scolding her for not dressing better, when he allows so handsomely. She must be a miser, for she was scarcely ever known to buy jewels for herself: her father gives them to her, or she would have none."

"I assure you, Mrs. Sibthorp, you are mistaken in thinking Florence Lyle a miser," said the meek and gentle Mrs. Winter, speaking

more decidedly than usual because praising one she loved. "I have known her from a child, and her mother had always to regulate rather than quicken her charities. Her father gives her so many jewels, that she has no occasion to buy them for herself, nor does she set much value on them: but her purse is ever open to the deserving; and though her dress is quiet and not over-trimmed, it is always elegant and suited to her station. I doubt if Mr. Lyle could scold her, and a hint ensures compliance with his wishes. She is always kind."

"Oh, pray do not trouble yourself further," interrupted Mrs. Sibthorp rudely; "I dare say she is perfection in the eyes of many—her father's riches would make her that; but I am not blinded by those things. As for being kind, I think she might be a little less so to some. The idea of sending her carriage for the Masons—people who failed and have nothing! I must say I was surprised to meet them here:—with the countess too!—and I be-

lieve she spoke to them. Then Mr. Stanton !—an artist, or author, or some such thing. I told her what he was some time ago, adding, we never asked him to our house; and she really had the folly to tell me that she considered a man of talent, principle, and education, a fitting guest for the first noble in the land,—seeming to insinuate that he was equal, if not superior, to the merchants of Fairport. I am for being civil to these sort of people, just bowing to them, and perhaps ordering a picture, or subscribing to a poem—but that is quite enough. I cannot say I have discovered the sense that they say she has, and I can tell her the gentlemen think very little of her ; but with her fortune she will be sure to marry, and her doting father, who thinks her so perfect, has caught a poor viscount for her. I always thought she was waiting for a coronet."

"That made her refuse your son, then," said Mrs. Hazel with the most provoking simplicity.

"No, ma'am, it never came to that!" and Mrs. Sibthorp drew up her short thick neck to its greatest length. "As we were the two first houses in Fairport, Mr. Sibthorp said that George would be a good match for Miss Lyle; but he begged his father would not think of it, as Miss Lyle was not at all the young lady to suit his taste."

"Well, what stories people do tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Hazel with an edifying surprise and horror at the wickedness of gossips. "I heard the other day, that your son had positively proposed to Miss Lyle herself, in this very conservatory, and had threatened to shoot himself if she refused him."

"Really, Mrs. Hazel, though people will invent wicked stories, I wonder that you should repeat them," replied the scarlet Mrs. Sibthorp, more angry at the truth of the tale than she would have been at its invention: "it is most extraordinary in Miss Lyle setting about such tales."

"It never came from Miss Lyle, who is far too delicate to mention such an occurrence, but was told by a gardener, who declared he had heard the offer and refusal," replied Mrs. Hazel, who esteemed Florence too highly not to defend her. "But as you say the whole story is false, you can't mind it much: we only feel galled when disagreeable truths are told."

"I don't know what you may do, Mrs. Hazel, but I don't like having disagreeable falsehoods told of me. Of course Miss Lyle does not object to the report, and will not check it, being a feather in her cap; but Mr. George Sibthorp is not so easily caught—he may look as high as he pleases. Miss Lyle will not be Miss Lyle much longer, I suppose; but the great match will be publicly announced in a day or two, though she chose to play prude and not let him sit next her at dinner; but I saw her blush, and Lord Clanellon's smile when he asked her to take wine. Much good may it do her!—a poor ruined viscount—

father and son both gamblers!—but she will be my lady, and that is enough for her. After all the fuss she makes with her father, and he with her, I wonder she can leave him: but a coronet is a great persuader. I expect she will give herself as many airs as Lady Aggenthorpe."

"Miss Lyle, I am convinced, will never give herself airs," said Mrs. Milford: "she is uniformly attentive and polite to all, though she must naturally have her preferences."

"There we differ, Mrs. Milford:—I think her exactly the person to give herself airs, and I hope Lord Clanellon, who seems a pleasing person, may find his wife what he expects; but I should not much wonder if her fortune is not what they say—sometimes people get the credit of being the richest in a neighbourhood without deserving it. Jemima says she cannot get on with Miss Lyle."

"Whoever obtains Miss Lyle as a wife, will obtain a treasure in every sense," remarked Mrs. Winter warmly.

"All may not think alike, Mrs. Winter; but it will not matter to us what she may be after her marriage:—I suppose she will play the exclusive, cut all her old friends, and talk of keeping up the distinction of rank. I detest your titled people—they are so proud."

"What do you think of the Fenwicks, Mrs. Sibthorp?" asked Mrs. Hazel.

"Who are the Fenwicks?"

"The new arrivals at Rose Cottage."

"Really, Mrs. Hazel, I do not visit them."

"Of course you mean to call? I hear they are very pleasant."

"Call on the Fenwicks, Mrs. Hazel? Certainly not. He is only a clerk in a second-rate mercantile house, and she but a poor curate's daughter."

"The Lyles have called, and asked them here to-day, but they were engaged."

"I am amazed!—but the Lyles have strange ideas, and I am not obliged to follow at their beck. Thank goodness, I can afford to think

for myself! In my opinion, distinctions in society must be maintained, or the state will soon become a democracy, and the mob have their own way. We should feel what is due to ourselves, or we cannot expect that others will feel what is due to us. A poor clerk and his wife are not quite fit associates for wealthy merchants, who are the riches of England."

"I thought you knew Mrs. Fenwick, though not her husband. Some one said that you had gone to the same school at M——, when your father, Mr. Barnes, kept the immense grocer's shop at the corner of High-street."

"You certainly are fortunate in hearing the most extraordinary tales, Mrs. Hazel; but if Mrs. Fenwick thinks by this report to induce me to visit her, she will find herself mistaken."

"She had no idea of the sort," replied Mrs. Hazel, enjoying the wrath of Mrs. Sibthorp: "on the contrary, she said that you never visited there, though her father insisted on her speaking to you, as you were schoolfellows, and Mr.

Barnes a very respectable, worthy man. I also heard that you had objected to visiting Mrs. Wingfield, though of an old family, because she does not keep a close carriage, and her husband is in the Customs: but I am sure that must be incorrect—you complain so much of people being exclusive. As you remarked, it really is shocking the tales people spread. Some will have it that you wish to establish an imitation Almack's, keeping out the heads of all families who have not such a fortune, and only admitting some of their young men, as you would otherwise want beaux."

"I do not intend to visit Mrs. Wingfield, Mrs. Hazel. She has but six hundred a year, and of course cannot expect to be in the first set; and I do think it desirable to have some barriers at the balls, that we may not be run against at every step by nobodies. Then, in my opinion, precedency should be a little attended to. I do not see why Mrs. Hulton should sit next the earl because he will speak to no one

else: others have quite as good a right to the honour—if honour it be. But all my exertions will be thrown away: the Lyles and the Hultons set their faces against the ball, pretending, that as almost all have risen by trade, it would be illiberal to exclude those who are only rising; so I suppose we shall not have an Almack's."

"A very sensible determination of the Lyles and Hultons; and, as they are the first people here, they are entitled to be consulted. Excluding persons from our society, who have character, education, and manners, but only hundreds for their income instead of thousands, would be little better than the pot calling the kettle names," observed Mrs. Hazel, whose remarks were frequently correct, if not elegant or polite; though her pleasure in tormenting Mrs. Sibthorp, who richly deserved that tormenting, was certainly not always defensible.

Mrs. Hazel was a strong-minded and acute, not a kind-hearted or amiable woman; and her sharp remarks were made for her own pleasure,

not in the hope of amending her hearer. When advice gives offence, should not the blame in many cases be equally divided between the advised and the adviser? The counsel that is given arrogantly or sharply can scarcely be expected to be received in humility and gratitude.

The ceremonies of tea and coffee, or rather coffee and tea, were duly observed; the whist-tables properly arranged, the earl, in high good humour, having asked Mrs. Hulton to join him in an attack on the countess and Dr. Woolston, the family physician; and relays of young ladies were stationed at the piano, provided with young gentlemen to compliment and turn the leaves of the music-books, sometimes too soon, some too late, rarely at the proper moment. Florence pleaded a cold as an excuse for not singing; but Julia, blushing at her acquiescence, took her seat at the harp, and allowed Clanellon to select a favourite song. So superior were her powers, that talkers list-

ened, and the card was suspended in the whist-player's hand!

"If you seldom play or sing, as you assure me, you are capable of feeling the deep pathos of sweet sounds—the sympathies of music are in your heart," said Clanellon, leaving Julia's side and approaching Florence, whom he had been watching with lover-like earnestness for the last few minutes.

"Julia's singing might teach the deaf to listen," replied Florence impracticably—but, nothing daunted, Clanellon took a seat on the sofa beside her, and tried to engage her in the appearance at least of an earnest and sentimental conversation. To make her neglect her other guests in her attention to him, appeared to be his present whim.

"At least you do not deny your sympathy with music;" and his voice was low and soft, his smile fascination.

"You should have long since been aware of my deficiency in the sentimental," she replied

coldly and very audibly; then turning to Mr. Blackmore, her other supporter, she asked him some question concerning India.

The indolent Eastern, roused at the question and flattered by her notice, favoured her with what he considered useful information on that interesting country. As we said before, his talking was not conversation — only the heads of a discourse.

"Afford you correct information, Miss Lyle. —Strange tales. — Pariah — sect — despised — poor.—Wild dogs—attack a man—Parsee—Mahouts—Tippoo Saib, wonderful man!—Hyder Ali!—Brahmins—high caste. —Juggernaut.—Ganges, holy river—descend Ghaut—drowned. —Cow sacred—Hoogly, large river—Nullah—Budgerow—Travel Dâk—Vishnoo—Avatar—Suttee—Tiger-hunt—Elephant, superb animal! —Howdah—Bombay—Elephantina—Gigantic figures — Himalaya mountains — Source of Ganges—Calcutta—Sumatra."

The intervals between these notes, for such

they might be considered, were filled up by a low and not unmusical hum, but no connecting words were to be distinguished, and his hearers were consequently never sated by the information received from Mr. Blackmore in his rambling epitomes. Florence looked all polite attention, turning to him from Lord Clanellon, who chose to exhibit a lover-like sympathy with his fair hostess;—till, catching Dunrayne's mischievous look, she could no longer restrain a smile; by which the highly-gratified Indian, considering it a tribute to his powers of amusement, was induced to continue; but before he had proceeded further than "Sirdar, and Sahib," he was called away to the whist-table.

"I hope you had a pleasant ride, Lord Clanellon?" said Dunrayne, taking a seat beside him, and thus preventing his addressing Florence.

"Very pleasant," replied Clanellon drily, surprised at his apparent courtesy, and not desiring his immediate vicinity.

"I thought you would find the air cooling and reviving," remarked Dunrayne significantly or not, as his hearer chose to take it.

I do not wonder at your thinking so—you appeared heated: for myself, I had not found it too warm," replied Clanellon as coolly as before.

"The temperaments of men are not alike: some show when they are warm; and some can command look, and word, and smile, and make no sign:—Mongibello with its cap of snow, yet raging furiously within its crater; a pirate vessel sailing without its ensign, or a false one. Brave mariners should sweep her from the ocean."

"Come with me, Dunrayne, and try your powers to persuade Miss Hulton to sing—she is timid," said Florence, who thought the conversation was taking rather a dangerous turn.

His cheek flushed, but he rose and accompanied her.

"Is this keeping your promise?" she asked reproachfully.

"I did not promise to submit to that fellow's impertinence. You could not expect that."

"I never did; but if there was impertinence, who set the example? After my frankness of the morning, I had hoped that you would not increase my difficulties."

"Nor will I, Florence—you appeal so sadly, I am shocked. I only meant an encounter of wits with the fellow just to tease him for your amusement."

"An encounter of tempers, you mean. I thank you for the intended amusement, so disinterestedly undertaken, but you have mistaken my taste. The schoolmaster is abroad: the sports of "Good Queen Bess" are voted coarse and vulgar by the descendants of her loving subjects; and young ladies no longer find delight in the baiting of bears, or the encounters of wild bulls."

"Thank you, Miss Lyle!" said Dunrayne between merriment and wrath.

"I hope you will do more, and pleasure me. Leave the fellow, as you so politely term him, alone: you are not his equal in an encounter of tongues;—he can restrain his temper, and will, if the restraining it can give him an advantage."

"And I cannot, you mean to say—and I must not quarrel with you for saying so, since it is the truth—his calmness puts me in a rage. But how came you to know his powers so well?—have you had an encounter?"

"I have."

He looked at her keenly, startled by her tone.

"The encounter was not pleasant," he observed.

"It was not," she replied: then added in a lighter tone, "But the triumph I claim as mine, though compelled to adopt his mode of warfare, and conceal how much my spirit had been ruffled. I judge that he will not seek a second encounter:—he knows me more as I am."

"And I may not avenge the wrong, Florence?"

"Certainly not. I require no champion, and to show resentment would prove the wrong had been felt. I claim your promise of good conduct to its full extent."

"Give me leave to torment some one? You cannot expect me to be good a whole day!"

"A whole day, Dunrayne?"

"Half a one, I mean. Positively I must be rude to some one; the fit is come upon me."

"It must be to me then: I cannot, as hostess, deliver up any of my guests to your tender mercies. But persuade Miss Hulton to sing first."

Miss Hulton did sing; and, pleased with her gentle manner, Dunrayne remained by her side, whilst Florence was conversing with Mrs. Milford. Clanellon showed neither surprise nor discomposure at the abrupt departure of Florence and Dunrayne: he addressed a few observations to a lady near him, joined for a

few moments in a conversation concerning a railroad in the neighbourhood, and then sauntered towards Julia Desmond, who was standing with others near the harp.

"Can you find a map of India, Florence?" said her father. "Mr. Blackmore doubts Mr. Ashton's correctness about the situation of one of the towns."

"Yes, it is in the library. Shall I bring it here, or will Mr. Ashton come with me?"

"I will go with you, if you will take the trouble to show it me," said Mr. Ashton quickly.

"Readily! it will be no trouble;" and she led the way to the library, taking a lighted lamp from the table in the ante-room as she passed through.

The evening being sultry, all the doors were open; and the rooms being *en suite*, those in the saloon could see into the library, though indistinctly, the latter being so poorly lighted by the single lamp: but hearing in one room a con-

versation carried on in the other, was impossible for mortal ears.

The map proved Mr. Ashton to be correct. Florence would have replaced it, but Mr. Ashton still bent over the mimic land. After some moments of silence he looked up quickly, and his whole bearing, as he addressed her, showed the force of feelings that, long restrained, now once allowed a course, threatened to break down every barrier which he would still oppose to stay them.

"You do not love Clanellon!" he said hastily, whilst his keen gaze was full upon her.

The earnest voice—the searching look, at first startled Florence; then, reassured and won to confidence by their very singularity, she answered frankly and without offence, "I do not, Mr. Ashton."

"Thank Heaven, I shall be spared that trial!" she thought she heard him murmur; and then he spoke as he had spoken before.

"It is well for you that you do not:—he is

not worthy of you. I read him whilst he thought that he was reading me. He is clever, fascinating—few can resist him; but you wear a heart charmed against his spells,—is it not so?"

"Yes; I judge of him as you do," she replied steadily; yet the colour deepened on her cheek, and she avoided his look.

"He is no favourite, I think, with Lord Dunrayne."

Florence understood him.

"He is no favourite with Lord Dunrayne; but my judgment is guided by neither."

Her quickness in freeing herself from this imputation appeared to strengthen some preconceived opinion of her companion, from whose smile she turned.

"Mr. Lyle thinks differently, does he not?"

"My father has not spoken to me on the subject," she answered coldly.

"That reply is not as frank as your former one. You think I have no right to ask these

questions:—I have a right—the right of love. I have foregone other rights, but I will not forego this. There are but two left me to love; and the heart, blighted by its own wrongs and sufferings, may yet bloom again in the shine of their happiness. One wrong can never be repaired—that——"

He stopped abruptly as he caught her wondering look, hid his face for some moments, and then proceeded with more composure.

"Since he is no favourite of yours, why not speak to your father? The whole country talks of an intended union."

"So I feared."

"Then why not speak to Mr. Lyle?"

"I would not pain him, Mr. Ashton; and Lord Clanellon must feel that it will be in vain to linger here. I fear clouding my father's brow though but for a moment, far more than the impertinence of Lord Clanellon or the idle tales of gossips:—my father's will has hitherto been mine."

"Then you will yield to it in this instance?

It is ever thus with woman—weak, vacillating, undetermined. Woe to the heart that confides in her love—that enshrines her in its secret depths!" The sallow cheek flushed as he spoke.

"I shall not yield," replied Florence firmly but gently, in answer to his sudden vehemence. "Yet I would rather his lordship should depart of his own free will, and save me even the appearance of crossing my father's wishes. At present I know not positively what those wishes are, though I may guess them."

"And is Robert Lyle to be blessed with such pure and holy affection? Is his child—her child, to shrink with loving terror lest a word should pain? Why is Robert Lyle to be thus blessed? I have no heart whereon to rest, and why should he? the false—the perjured—the unnatural——"

"Stop, Mr. Ashton!" said Florence indignantly, interrupting his frenzied burst. "Is this language for a daughter's ear, in her father's house, and from her father's guest?

Shame on me, that I have listened to your words so long—and false words too! How dare you breathe so foul a slander? What stain rests on my father's name? I challenge all or any to the proof!"

He looked at her as she stood before him—beautiful, brightly beautiful, in her holy anger, her fond heart beating nigh to bursting at this insult to her parent. An agony too strong for words to tell was painted on his features; the flush left the sallow cheek; the fierce glance softened; gentle and tender memories came one by one across his mind, and his bowed frame shook,—but he spoke no word.

"Am I to consider your silence as a retraction of the slander?" she demanded.

"Slander! — was it slander?" he asked bitterly.

"It was!" replied the daughter proudly.

"Well, be it so," he said more gently, after a pause, laying a light touch on her arm to prevent her departure. "At times I know not what I say: the memory of wrongs and pangs,

—of cruel wrongs and bitter pangs—crowd on my mind till I am not myself. It may be that in this madness I lay my wrongs on those who have not wrought them: I may confound the simple with the deceitful—the guilty with the innocent. I do not say it is so;—but I would have you believe it. I thought my heart was steeled to bear; and yet——It matters not: I would not cloud your brow—I would not blanch your cheek. You will forgive me, Florence, will you not, even for her sake,—your mother's sake?" His voice faltered, his eye swam in tears.

"My mother!—did you know my mother?" asked Florence, forgetting in her pity and surprise his accusation of her father,

He gave no answer, but continued to look upon her, his features all the while a tablet,

"Whereon were traced unutterable things."

"You knew my mother, and you loved her!" said Florence, taking his hand with a sudden impulse neither to be controlled nor analysed.

"Who said I loved her?" he demanded

wildly; then meeting her pitying look, he bowed his head upon her hand, and she felt a tear fall on it.

"This is folly!" he said, looking up,—"worse than weakness. I should have known I could not bear to think of her wrongs—hardships—insults—all, all, but the remembrance of her love—the memory—"

"I fear that you have suffered much," observed Florence soothingly as he stopped abruptly. "You speak of wrongs and hardships: could I—could my father—could any aid you?" she asked, forgetting that the trembling, suffering being before her was the rich and envied nabob.

"Your father aid me! Robert Lyle!" he repeated vehemently, dropping the hand he had retained, and stepping back, whilst passion gleamed in his eye and flushed on his sunken cheek. "I would rather —— But I grieve you," he said, checking himself on the instant as he marked the tears brought into her dark

eyes by sympathy with him. "I would not pain you for what I deemed the world could offer in my youthful hours, when I thought that life might be one cloudless day of joy—I would not pain you, for you look like her.—You must not heed my words—they come without my will:—you pity, and you will forgive me, Florence, will you not?" taking her hand, and looking into her face with a fond and pleading look.

"I do forgive you; you could not have thus spoken of my father but from confusion caused by suffering: he would do wrong to none. You are mistaken—he never saw you till a few weeks since."

"Does he say so?"

"Yes. And now tell me of my dear mother: I would know when you knew her."

"Ask it not!" he replied wildly, waving his hand between them; "I never said I knew her."

"You pleaded for forgiveness in her name."

"Did I?" he said more gently; "and you granted it. Well, what of that? I had offended your doting love towards one parent—how could I better hope forgiveness than by pleading for it in the name of the other? How I envy Robert Lyle your holy and confiding love! I would give all I have amassed—ay, life itself—for one such look as I have seen you turn on him. But he loves you — loves you almost as I would love you! and it is that has turned my heart from wrath. But your mother,—did he love her—love her to the last with an unchanging love?"

"Who shall doubt it! He cannot even now name her without faltering;" her own tears falling as she bore witness to her father's love.

"Bless him for that, at least! Yet it is strange,—love and hate. How can the same heart cherish both?—But strangers come, and I have not said what I would. Florence! my child! you are happy and require no friend: the

time may come when you may want some arm to guard — some tongue to plead for you! Your father is ambitious, and may urge this union. You will not think this.—Alas, my child! I hoped as you do once, but I have lived to know that all things change: yet not all—love will remain when other things depart. I do not say that you will want a friend, — I do but say you may. I go to-morrow, — I may be absent months: we may not meet again;— strange thoughts come crowding over me,— the figures of the dead rise up before me,— the living own me not, but gaze upon me with strange looks. My heart, that never beat the quicker when death was by my side and all around, now trembles at a whisper. A look — a tone, the perfume of a flower — the shadowing of a cloud, can wake my soul to suffering and to madness. It may be only the stirring of sad memories — I know not; but I would be prepared for what may come. Take this," drawing a ring from his bosom

which he would have placed on her finger, but she drew back. "Do not refuse it, Florence! I am no silly youth; I have suffered much from those you love — do not you add another pang!"

She hesitated, deeply moved by his earnest manner, but said something of its value.

"Value! Think you these glittering gauds have value in my eyes? I toiled—I laboured to obtain them; for the toil prevented maddening thoughts, and their possession might fulfil my longing for revenge. I won them—but they did not—they could not bring me peace. It was not in my mind—it was not in my heart: wrath and revenge were there, and peace cannot dwell with them. And what cared I for luxuries or riches, save as they gave a hope of vengeance —that burning thirst I could not quench? I would away and cross the sea to slake it. The shadow of death has been upon me since; its terrible hand was on my brow, and I felt the dread of judgment—the horror of submitting

to the demon's rule. One young and daring risked his life for mine — saved me, soothed me. He was a link in the chain of early memories. His efforts called up better thoughts; —his kindness was like dew from heaven, cooling the burning thirst of hate. I was not then alone! I rose from the sick bed another, and, I humbly hope, a better man. And then, and now, I feel the value of my wealth won for unholy ends—to gratify a sinful longing. It may link me again with happiness—bring joy to two noble spirits.—Time presses. Take it, my child!" placing the ring upon her finger. "Whatever dangers may arise, call upon me, and this shall be the pledge that you shall not call in vain. Life—half my fortune, shall be given—thankfully, joyfully given—if I can save you but one pang. Do not say I will not save you, for I will!—do not say I cannot save you, for I can! You may not even guess my power. One word from me would turn your father as I will. Send to me boldly:—if

living, I will come;—if dead, you will know all. Take it for your father's sake. I will aid even him, because you love him; but tell him not I will—speak not to him of this pledge, or I will not redeem it. Ask me nothing;—hereafter you will understand how you have shielded one you loved from hate. Your father, too, shall know me as I am—but tell him not of this meeting now, it would only pain him;" then seeing she looked doubtful, he added, "You may trust me. Now calm yourself:—the cold and the indifferent are approaching. The lip must show a smile,—the brow be open, uncontracted. We must wear a mask if we would not be the mock of fools. Heaven bless you, Florence! an old man's prayers and love go with you!"

He dropped her hand as he concluded, and turned over the maps; whilst Florence walked to a book-case, keeping her back to those who entered.

Mr. Ashton's answer to Mr. Blackmore con-

cerning the disputed point was delivered in his usual languid tone.

"Mr. Stanton and I have been admiring that exquisite Rembrandt, and, I am afraid, coveting its possession," said Mr. Hulton.

"I am glad you like it," replied Mr Lyle. "I am no great judge of these matters myself, but I am delighted when my friends give them a value in my eyes by their approval."

"Do not pretend to be no judge," observed Lord Aggenthorpe, joining the party on the instant, the whist-table having broken up. "No one can see your collection and doubt your taste. I am half tempted whilst looking at them to wish I had been a merchant: a long line of rich and tasteful ancestors could not have collected greater treasures."

"I am delighted that you approve, my lord, for I cannot but distrust my own judgment. Engaged as I am in business, and my father before me, (the founder of my family, as I may say,) I can have little pretension to

taste. To be sure, some people do say ours is an old family reduced,—that it had even some connexion with royalty; but I never heed such idle tales. I am not ashamed to own that my father rose from nothing; and though he did give me an expensive education, still I am a merchant, and proud of the title."

"Ay, to be sure! a rich merchant stands higher than any!" interrupted Mr. Sibthorp. "What is the use of birth and title without fortune, I wonder?—no more use than those gewgaws. What will they sell for? — that is their worth, say I. They tell me that you gave seven hundred pounds for that piece of canvass, and not in a handsome frame neither;" pointing to a beautiful picture of one of the most esteemed Italian masters;—"is that true?"

"Yes; and it was considered a great bargain too," said Mr. Lyle.

"And I would not give you five hundred

pence for the thing unless I was certain of selling it at a profit. I see no beauty in it."

"Others do: it is a great favourite with Florence," said the father decidedly.

"Maybe: girls have odd fancies, always wanting some gewgaw or other; blonde, or silk, or satin, or something. It is a dull-looking picture to me; and what is the use of it, I ask?"

"I should despair of making you feel the beauty or the use of painting," remarked Mr. Hulton with an equivocal smile.

"So I think," replied Mr. Sibthorp triumphantly. "It is of no use at all. To be sure, that is a pretty picture of Miss Lyle: I should like just such another of Jemima, for the girl is a good girl enough, and will take any man I like with a large fortune. I wish you would send the painter over to me, that I may make a bargain with him; and if he works cheap and well, he shall paint George too."

" Mr. Gordon could not produce such another picture, and would not, I am sure, attempt Miss Sibthorp," said Mr. Stanton warmly; for he knew and appreciated the absent Walter.

" He might find Jemima more difficult to do justice to, perhaps,—she is so lively; but he could try, and I would pay him accordingly."

" You mistake me, Mr. Sibthorp: Mr. Gordon, I know, never intends to attempt another portrait; and he is no regular artist."

" Never mind; make the offer. A poor man will do many things to-morrow that he refused to do to-day."

" Perhaps Mr. Sibthorp would make it worth his while," observed Clanellon, glancing at Florence, who was just within hearing, but her face turned from him.

" You do not know Mr. Gordon," replied Mr. Stanton.

" No, but I had understood he was only a

poor clerk, and therefore, I concluded, not averse to making money."

"Circumstances induced Mr. Gordon to become a clerk for a time; but he is one of Nature's own nobility," replied Mr. Stanton with the sympathy of a kindred mind.

"A poor nobleman, by all accounts:—no enviable station! I pity my brother peer!" said Clanellon.

Lord Aggenthorpe looked proud—Dunrayne fierce, and would have spoken, but Florence placed her hand on his arm, and Mr. Stanton answered on the instant—

"I dispute not with you as to how much a poor lord of man's creating may deserve our pity, your lordship not being one of those who speak of things of which they know nothing; but on one of Nature's nobles—a nobility of mind and soul, your pity would be wasted:

'Their rule is o'er the mind—their heritage high thought!'

Mr. Gordon is above fortune. If he seeks not

wealth, it is because he holds it at its real worth—he has enough for all his wants."

"We matter-of-fact people—we creatures of the earth, may be permitted to desire a more profitable heritage than high thought,—a richer realm to rule than is the mind:—we leave such glittering baubles to enthusiasts," replied Clanellon rather scornfully, unable entirely to suppress the ill humour which had been chafing through the day.

"Poverty is Walter Gordon's own choice," observed Mr. Lyle. "He should have been my partner, or I would have made him richer; but he would neither. To his father I owed my life and that of one dear to me, and the debt has never been repaid. Walter was too independent to take anything but what he earned, and barely that."

"A marvellous person! a splendid beggar!" remarked Clanellon with a sneer.

"A man's a fool not to take what he can get," muttered Mr. Sibthorp.

A move amongst some of the departing guests broke off the conversation.

"Burking is too good for that fellow!" exclaimed Dunrayne to Florence in an under tone.

"Far too good! so leave him to a worse fate—the torment of his own evil passions."

"That is meant for a hint to me, I suppose: rather cruel, considering how well I have behaved."

"You have been marvellously grave and quiet for the last five minutes, I admit. On what have your thoughts been employed?"

"I have been trying to solve an enigma."

"What do you mean?" asked Florence, looking at him earnestly; for the suspicion crossed her mind that he had overheard the conversation in the library.

"Mean? Bless your heart! I mean nothing; but Miss Sibthorp wishes to know,

> "What is hot, and what is cold?
> What is bought, and what is sold?
> What is cold, and what is hot?
> What now is, and what is not?

Can you assist me? I shall gain immortal credit if I furnish the solution."

"I believe it," she replied significantly; but Dunrayne took no notice of her manner.

"You cannot assist me? Then you shall tell me, instead, what were your thoughts a little time since, when Mr. Sibthorp criticised the picture of the Day of Judgment, and proclaimed that the attendant angels lived upon poor fare. Your countenance excited my curiosity."

"I am afraid my thoughts were scarcely what they should have been. I thought of the Icelanders' idea of heaven,—'a place where large caldrons of sea-blubber should be ever boiling, with liberty to cut and eat at discretion;' and I wickedly wondered whether his conception of the joys of heaven would be much more refined and elevated."

"Capital! I am glad you can be a little wicked sometimes: I shall claim greater immunity for the future."

"Very wicked, very often, Dunrayne; but that can be no excuse for you."

"Very wicked, very often, Florence? I am quite shocked! I must come over to-morrow and give you a lecture."

"I hope, if you do, you will set an example. Promise that, or I shall not be at home."

"You shall see."

The earl and countess approached to pay their parting compliments, and the cordial "good-night" of both assured Florence that, despite a few *contretems*, her endeavours to please and save them from annoyance had been duly appreciated. Dunrayne saw this too, and he had happy dreams that night.

"What a delightful evening!" said Julia Desmond to her friend before they parted for the night.

"I am glad you had cause for pleasure, Julia: I felt none."

"No pleasure, Florence? And I was so happy!"

"What made you so happy?"

Julia turned away with a glowing cheek.

"A thousand things,—or none. We feel happy sometimes without knowing why. Lord Clanellon said you looked very happy whilst talking to Lord Dunrayne."

"Lord Clanellon's words are not always to be trusted, Julia. He says one thing when he means another:—he can hate and yet smile; flatter, yet destroy."

"You have never forgiven his rudeness the evening of his arrival," observed Julia pettishly, shrinking from the hand laid affectionately on her shoulder.

"I hope I may not be called on to forgive him a worse wrong—winning a heart only to mock its tenderness and triumph in its pain," said Florence with a gentle and loving earnestness.

"No fear of that!" replied Julia proudly, withdrawing from the arm that would have twined round her neck.

"I wish he had never come:—and he has been here so long!" remarked Florence with a sigh.

"Wish he had never come, Florence!—how can any one wish that? And think he has stayed long!—his visit has been as but one short, happy hour."

"Julia, dear Julia, be warned in time! Lord Clanellon loves, or at least would wed another."

"And what care I if he do?" sang the blushing Julia, looking all love and loveliness, and unbelief. Then escaping the detaining hand of her friend, she left the room, flinging back a gay "good-night" through the closing door.

It was the first time since Julia's visit that the friends had parted without an embrace. Florence was hurt; she thought of following; but she heard Julia lock her door, and gave up the intention. It was but a trifle certainly, and yet it weighed upon her spirits in conjunction with the other events of the day. It had been to her anything but a happy day! It was hours ere she fell asleep; and even in her

dreams the feeling never left her, that a cloud was coming on her fortunes—sorrows rising on her path. As she looked from her window the next morning—as bright and sunny a morning as human eye could see—she sighed, for the feeling had not departed; and as she saw Clanellon and Julia standing on the lawn together, the fancy deepened to a pain.

An hour after, and her spirit was as buoyant as in days of yore. Long before breakfast was concluded, an express summoned Clanellon to attend his mother, supposed to be dying. His looks displayed sufficient grief on the occasion; though they rather brightened as he caught the pitying glance of Florence, who thought of her own mother. The tears of Julia fell unheeded.

"You have paid us a short visit, my lord; but I shall hope you will not forget us:—we shall be always happy to see you," said Mr. Lyle, wringing his guest's hand with friendly warmth. "I trust you will find the countess better."

"I trust I shall, Mr. Lyle; and, believe me, I have been too happy at Atherton ever to forget its inmates, or to defer, save through necessity, a renewal of the pleasure."

No one could have doubted his sincerity. He was sincere—the inmates of Atherton could not be forgotten. It is shrewdly suspected that each lady believed herself the magnet of attraction. So far they thought alike; but beyond that there was this difference: one shrunk from the thought, as we shrink from what we dread and loathe; the other nursed the hope as the brightest that this world could yield.

"Farewell, Miss Lyle!" said Clanellon, bowing respectfully upon the hand which, in her pleasure at his departure, and her pity for its cause, she had frankly given, with a wish for his mother's restoration. "Think of me, and think of me favourably, till we meet again. If I am not what I should be, judge not too harshly what I am. Sometimes the lips say nothings because the heart feels deeply—too

deeply for its own peace, or for the common eye. The hope of meeting you again—of living in your thought as one esteemed, will urge me on to all good deeds. If my wishes could avail, you would never know a grief. Farewell!"

He had left the room before Florence had sufficiently recovered from her surprise at his emotion and self-condemning words to make him a reply.

Julia was in the ante-room, bending over some flowers; and the parting guest's adieus were uttered in too low a tone for Florence or Mr. Lyle to catch their import. Of course those adieus, called away as was Clanellon on such a melancholy errand, could not boast of gaiety; but Florence thought she saw through the open door a carelessness in his demeanour, contrasting with his apparent earnestness of the day before towards her friend and his late manner to herself;—and no sooner had he left the house, than Julia retired to her own

room, and, pleading a headache, remained alone till dinner. That the parting had been sorrowful to one at least, for some cause or other, Julia's pale cheeks and rayless eyes sufficiently evinced; but as her answers to any observation touching on the subject however remotely were brief and abrupt, Florence made no remark on her looks, only seeking by a thousand gentle attentions to dispel her grief. Instead of soothing the anxieties of another, she was too soon called on to bear anxieties of her own. Julia returned to her aunt, in obedience to her summons, shortly after the departure of Clanellon; and Florence was left alone to nurse her father, who, about the same period, was attacked by a sudden and dangerous illness.

CHAPTER IV.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!"

I doubt!——
I act!——

The beauties of a glorious sunrise, with its richly-blending hues illumining the gentle haze of dawn, were still in all their splendour, when Florence, gently closing the door of her father's chamber, trod the gallery leading to her own apartment with a slow and noiseless step. All night had she sat by her father's couch, tending him with all a daughter's love; smoothing the pillow rumpled by the turning of the restless head; holding the cup to the

parched lip; soothing with tears and gentle words the moanings of the sufferer; watching — listening with panting eagerness for the deep breathing which should prove the presence of that sleep that was to be the symptom of recovery.

The father's eye had been bent on her till the languid lid closed over it; her hand had been held in his till sleep relaxed its grasp. The loud and unequal breathings of the sufferer became more gentle and more uniform; a slight dew came on the burning brow; and the friendly pressure of the physician's hand as he led her from the room, and his few but cheering words, assured her that she need no longer tremble for her father's life. As far as man could speak on such a subject, so surely was his recovery certain, though it might be slow. Florence would have lingered by the sick man's side; but the physician looked at her and was peremptory. "He would watch during her absence;—rest was absolutely ne-

cessary for her, as she might still have many a day of anxious care."

As she passed a window looking out upon the garden, and the park beyond, the golden beauties of the morning caught her eye. She turned towards it, and the tears of joy and thankfulness fell unheeded. Her young heart was once more full of hope and gratitude; the fears of the fond child vexed her no more. And that lovely dawn, did it not seem to smile upon her, whispering words of gentle promise? But one short day before, she might have fancied that it mocked her with its dazzling beauty, heedless, or scoffing at her sorrow: now, she could gaze upon that beauty with a smile,—it seemed an emblem and a type of future good.

The human heart!—hath it not innumerable fancies?—strange, wild fancies? — some clothed in the gloom of night—some bright in the splendours of the dawn — some sad yet gorgeous, as eve's sunset glories? And come they there for good or ill? — are they syrens

that would lead us into error, or the scattered but still glorious remnants of a better, purer being? I know not! Who doth know? Who hath fathomed the human heart,—read all its weakness, all its strength?—traced thought to its hidden springs, its half-choked fountains? One—only One. The Will that made it!—Who shall control it? He who formed it;—and man by His granted power.

Florence was still looking from the window, when a figure stepped out before her from among the shrubs, whose closely-wrapped cloak, slouched hat, and large handkerchief, nearly concealing the lower part of his face, bespoke a suspicious anxiety for concealment. The man looked cautiously and searchingly round, then earnestly up at the window; and when satisfied of the identity of the person looked on, made signs too clearly indicating an anxious desire for a private interview to be mistaken.

Florence started, returned a sign of acquiescence, and then proceeded to her own room

with a changing cheek and a hurried step. Hastily putting on shawl and close bonnet, she passed out at a private door, of which she always kept the key, with a cautious tread, and in a few minutes stood beside her mysterious visitor.

"We should neither be seen nor overheard," said the stranger in a cautious whisper, after shaking hands with Florence and hearing of her father.

"Supposing that your errand must be urgent—your wish for secrecy not without good cause, I have brought the key of the summer-house. No one is stirring yet, and no one at work near there. In the upper room we shall be secure from curious eyes or ears."

The stranger bowed, and following her lead, they were soon in the upper apartment of the summer-house, and the lower door locked to prevent intrusion. Florence placed a chair for her visitor, threw off shawl and bonnet,—for she was feverish from long watching,—and prepared

herself for the expected communication, not without some anxiety, yet with the firmness of one whose powers ever rose in the time of trial. The stranger, on the contrary, retained every wrap which had been assumed for concealment. The hat alone was removed; and even that was doffed with reluctance, and only as an imperative necessity in the presence of a lady. His anxious peering into every corner of the room—and it was an octagon—lest a listener should be concealed in some spider's web,—the small portion of the chair he occupied,—the general character of his face and figure, as far as it was revealed,—the spreading out of the folds of his handkerchief till they nearly touched his nose — and his embarrassed silence when these arrangements were concluded, clearly spoke him a cautious and a timid man. Despite her anxiety, a half smile played on the slightly curled lip of Florence as she marked these manœuvres; but her impatience induced her to break the silence.

"My father's confidential clerk would not have requested a private interview at such an hour but for some pressing purpose that can admit of no delay. Tell me, Mr. Walton, what I have to hear: if evil, as I fear it is, still do not hesitate. With my dear father's danger no longer pressing on my heart, all other evils will be slight."

"You say truly, Miss Florence; I should not have thought of asking, but—I am aware of the impropriety of our meeting thus—yet—"

"Pass we that!" said the young lady, interrupting him, with a checked smile as she looked on his grey hairs. "The blame of the impropriety must certainly rest with you, and you must clear yourself to my father hereafter; but now I must entreat you to explain without further apology."

The honest but timid old man bowed, fidgeted, hesitated, and at length explained in a less formal and methodical manner than usual the cause of his singular conduct.

He gave her to understand that Mr. Sawyer, who had been admitted into partnership some years back by Mr. Lyle when his wife's health required a residence in Devonshire and a sail to Madeira, had by his plausible manners and capacity for business usurped the greater part of the management of the concern, through the growing indolence of Mr. Lyle, though his share in the risk and profits was but small. Mr. Walton had always doubted his prudence; but, during Mr. Lyle's illness, now of some continuance, he had engaged in speculations of such doubtful profit and immense risk, that the honest clerk's face was pale with terror as he declared, that unless some check could be placed upon his proceedings, he anticipated, notwithstanding Mr. Lyle's immense resources, future embarrassment, to say the least.

This was what Florence could not have conjectured; brought up, as she had been, in the idea that her father's wealth was little less than boundless—his credit but the firmer for the

many failures of past years, and Mr. Sawyer a clever merchant and an honest man. True, she had never liked him; the manners others admired, she thought fawning; and she felt, with a woman's tact, that though owing much to her father, and aware how greatly he would disapprove of such an alliance, he would have profited by his experience and knowledge of the human heart to win her hand, had not her uniformly cold demeanour shown him the folly of such a hope.

Agitated and distressed at the intelligence she could not fail to be; and her knowledge of accounts and some of the leading features of business, acquired partly from fancy when a child, partly from writing letters for her father during a former illness, enabled her more fully to comprehend the threatened danger. She took the paper in which Mr. Walton had clearly stated every particular as far as his knowledge extended, perused it, was silent for some moments, and then spoke with a calm-

ness and decision that amazed and delighted her father's clerk.

"We owe you many thanks, Mr. Walton, for this information; the more, as I am aware you consider this frankness attended with risk to yourself:" and a faint smile again lighted up her features. "The danger appears imminent:—it only remains to decide on the best plan to lessen or avert it; and here I must entreat your friendly counsel. My father cannot be spoken to on the subject. You shake your head, but that is a point admitting of no debate. The medical men say that the slightest agitation might prove fatal; and I will not risk my father's life though the wealth of both the Indies depended on his knowledge."

"It is a most difficult and distressing situation; but in such a case,—perhaps in a few hours Mr. Lyle might be informed without danger," stammered the cautious Mr. Walton; then, urged to greater energy by seeing his words made no impression, he added more

boldly: "I beg your pardon, Miss Lyle, but there is no time for delay or delicacy. Consider, that even a suspicion of insolvency would break Mr. Lyle's heart:—I am sure he would never recover it."

"The shock would be dreadful to him and to you, Mr. Walton; for I know how much you have the honour of our house at heart: but if such a trial should come, I trust that my father would bear it as a man—more, as a Christian."

Mr. Walton bowed, for her kind mention of himself had moved him, but he did not speak. Her ashy cheek and quivering lip proved that she neither underrated the probability nor the extent of the threatened danger; but there was that in her tone and look which showed that she was nerved to bear it, and her resolve unalterable. She felt all that a merchant's daughter must feel; but she did not shrink from the approaching peril. She was one who would act as long as action could avail; and if misfortune came, would bear it with re-

signation. There was something almost awful to the timid Walton in the resolution of one so young and lovely. He had known, had loved her from a child; but his regard, always mingled with respect, was now little short of veneration.

"Since our only chance of avoiding the danger rests in immediately checking Mr. Sawyer in his schemes, our first act must be to decide on a fitting person for the task. You are acquainted with all the circumstances—are known to enjoy my father's confidence, and can thus best baffle the wily speculator. Could you—would you, by undertaking this unpleasant duty, double our debt of gratitude?"

Florence had hesitated before she spoke, and her appeal was made in doubt; for she felt that Mr. Walton's habitual caution and timidity might disincline him to the office, and would certainly lessen his efficiency in it should he undertake it.

The appeal was answered with a deprecat-

ing hurry that proved the correctness of her judgment.

"Me, Miss Lyle! how could you think of such a thing? I am highly honoured by your good opinion; but what could I do against Mr. Sawyer? He would heed me as nothing. I would do anything in the world for you or Mr. Lyle, as you must know, but in this way I should only do you harm."

"I doubt neither your will nor ability to serve us, Mr. Walton, but see the difficulty as you do," said Florence, marking her companion's alarm at the possibility of not convincing her of the worse than inutility of such an appointment. "We must think of some other to encounter Mr. Sawyer. There is Mr. Hulton,—quick, clever, of known integrity, and, I am sure, a friend. Could I persuade him to forego any delicacy he might feel in interfering by stating the urgency of the occasion, I can imagine no one better fitted to our wishes."

"For Heaven's sake, Miss Florence, don't think of such a thing! You will be the ruin of the house at once."

In the energy of his alarm, the old man clasped his hands, and repented his late unusual boldness in having stepped beyond the duties of his office. "This comes of telling a woman!" thought he to himself: "they have always some mad scheme or other. But then, poor thing! how should she understand business?"

"How ruin our house?" she asked a little impatiently: "I will answer for Mr. Hulton's honour."

"Ah, Miss Florence! you are young, and do not know the world as I do. When you come to be as old as I am, you will be less willing to answer for any one. Not that I would say that Mr. Hulton is not an honourable man, might not act as a friend: we should always speak well of merchants; but never, Miss Florence, if you would not be in the Gazette,

let them know your difficulties. I am almost afraid to name them here, lest any one should hear me;" gazing suspiciously round. "A look, a word, the pointing of a finger, can destroy a merchant's credit:—and what is any merchant without credit?—no better than a lost man. No, Miss Florence, I would rather have died than tell you, if I had thought you would have exposed our embarrassments to another merchant. To hint such a thing of your father's house, that stands so high, and is owned the first in Fairport! All the other houses are jealous of his credit, and if they got a hint, would hunt him as a pack of curs would a dying mastiff. Besides, our house has some joint concerns with Mr. Hulton; and if he heard of our difficulty, he would call in his money, and that might quite ruin us as we stand now. And who could blame him? You can't expect a man to lose money when he can save it."

"Lose money, Mr. Walton!" repeated Florence in deep emotion. "Do you mean to say

that others may suffer through our means? The worst I had contemplated was poverty for ourselves."

"Do not look so, Miss Florence! I do not say that—I hope and trust it will not come to that:—if we could control Mr. Sawyer, all would yet be well; but Mr. Hulton must not be the person."

Florence had never heard Mr. Walton speak so decidedly before, and therefore gave up the point the more readily, supposing his reasons to be unanswerable. For an instant she thought of Mr. Ashton; but he was gone to the North—from his residence in India could know nothing of mercantile concerns—was the last person to whom her father would wish to be indebted, and before he could return the mischief would be done. She may have thought of some other, for a faint glow came on her cheek, which faded as quickly as it came; and, after a painful pause, she again spoke, but in a more doubtful and subdued tone.

"If I may not tell our difficulties that I may seek assistance, but one plan remains, and that not a wise one. You must explain everything clearly to me, stating how each danger may be avoided, and I will speak to Mr. Sawyer myself. Unhappily I cannot be long absent from my father; but if I only look fatigued, he will insist on my leaving him, and thus furnish the time I may require. I cannot cope in argument with Mr. Sawyer; but, clever and wily as he is, I know he will yield to a decided opposition. Deceit cannot cope with fearless candour. Of course I argue no point, but insist on having my will performed, shrouding my ignorance of business under feminine obstinacy. In the executive part I trust you will not object to be my agent:—as such I shall name you in Mr. Sawyer's presence. Should my father wake, he will believe me sleeping; but in less than two hours I shall be with Mr. Sawyer. In the mean time, I must entreat you to instruct me. You cannot think what an excellent man

of business I shall make!" she added, trying to smile away the opposition which she saw her plan would encounter.

She knew Mr. Walton was one who never allowed a difficulty to escape him. With him the time for action had departed before that for deliberation had ended: he could foresee misfortunes—he could neither prevent nor repair them. He sat in silence, wondering at the energy and boldness of her decision; the clearness with which she traced her course — the promptness with which she prepared to meet her difficulties: yet, with all his admiration, the plan was not to his taste. He had all the contempt for a woman's power of understanding or transacting business so natural to a practical man; and though bowing before the lofty decision of her character, never fully felt till now, her ignorance of mercantile affairs precluded, in his opinion, all hope of her being able to contend with such a man as Sawyer. "He will flatter and talk plausibly, and she

will yield, as her father has done before. And how can we expect a woman to do else?" he thought. "This will never do."—But how was he to intimate his disapproval without offence,—the seeming to slight her abilities? He hesitated so long as to the most polite way of hinting dissent, that Florence again spoke.

"You make no objection, therefore so let it be; and now it only remains that you should instruct me in the details."

"I am very sorry, Miss Lyle—I do not mean to say—that is, I have no doubt—but—"

"But what, Mr. Walton? I must pray you to speak out openly and quickly. There is no time to lose, and this is no moment for an idle delicacy. But if you object to this plan, I know of no other that I can pursue; and your information, though kindly meant, can be of no avail, only adding the pangs of anticipation to the horrors of certainty."

"I would not pain you, Miss Lyle, and you know it," said the old man slowly—we

might add humbly, "but you bid me speak, and I must say, though you do all that woman can do, what will that avail against such a man as Sawyer? I never knew him fail in making others act as he pleased. It was a sad day when he came into our house! Your respected father has long left almost all to him—we are but puppets in his hands."

"It may be so, Mr. Walton; but he has felt that me he could not turn as he desired. I do not underrate his powers—I am aware of my own weakness; but I go as a child to save a father—as a merchant's daughter to protect the interests of his creditors. I do not seek the trial in my pride—I do but go in my humility, and with a Higher Power than woman's weakness can supply. I would avoid the meeting if I might; but I know no other plan."

"There is one person," said Mr. Walton, hesitating and doubtful, shrinking from, yet admiring her lofty beauty.

"Who?" demanded Florence with a slight

faltering in her speech and a breathless waiting for his answer.

"Mr. Gordon."

Florence drew a deep breath and turned in silence to the window.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lyle, for naming him; but I know no other who can aid us," said Mr. Walton respectfully. "I am aware that neither you nor your father think of Mr. Gordon as you once did; still I believe you do not doubt his ability; and I can answer for his will to serve you."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Walton," replied Florence quickly. "My father and myself think as highly of Mr. Gordon now as we ever did: regret, not anger, was Mr. Lyle's feeling at his departure. His ability to serve us none can doubt, and of his will to do so I entertain no apprehension; but he is probably hundreds of miles distant, and our case admits of no delay."

"No, Miss Florence, he is not hundreds of

miles distant," said the old man, rubbing his hands with glee: "Mr. Gordon is here."

"Mr. Gordon here! Where?" demanded Florence, looking round the apartment hurriedly—almost wildly.

"Compose yourself, Miss Florence," observed her companion quietly. "Mr. Gordon is not at Atherton;—but he is at Fairport."

Florence did compose herself, as recommended; but a deep flush lingered on her cheek, and he could not decide whether she was relieved or disappointed by the intelligence that Walter Gordon was not at Atherton.

"How do you know Mr. Gordon is at Fairport? He has not called on my father."

"No, Miss Florence, but he intends to do so this morning. He is only passing through Fairport in his way to join Sir Charles Cleveland at Paris, and called on me late last night to inquire after the family. He was much shocked on hearing of Mr. Lyle's illness, and said he should ride over in the morning; other-

wise, he had only intended to see Mr. Lyle to-day at the counting-house, and then continue his journey. He made many inquiries after your health, and how you bore your father's danger."

"I am obliged to him," said Florence, trying to look grateful; but she succeeded so ill as to confirm Mr. Walton in his idea that she believed Gordon cooled in his regard towards the family, and he answered accordingly.

"Indeed, Miss Florence, you need not doubt Mr. Gordon's wish to serve you. He would have called at Atherton, but arrived too late, and was engaged to meet a friend at Crolford by one to-day. Had you seen him when I told him of your father's illness and your tender nursing, you could not have doubted his regard for the family. 'What must not Miss Lyle have suffered!' was his exclamation; and I never saw a man turn so white all of a minute. He never made such fine speeches to young ladies as some do; but he has a great

respect and esteem for your father, I can assure you."

"Do not trouble yourself further on this point, Mr. Walton: I never doubted Mr. Gordon's respect and esteem for my father," replied Florence with an impatience unusual to her; asking immediately after, with a hurry and eagerness as unwonted, "Did Mr. Gordon know our situation?"

"Heaven forbid that it should be known by others!"

"I meant, did you tell him?"

"No, Miss Lyle, you could not think I should be guilty of such presumption; but I did think of him last night, in case you would not tell Mr. Lyle, and that made me hurry over here this morning. Having been in our house, he knows all our connexions, and will understand everything in a few words. He is almost the only person whom Mr. Sawyer could not wind as he liked; and I believe he once warned Mr. Lyle of his character, and cautioned him

against some of his wild speculations: but Mr. Sawyer made all seem right to your respected father, and pleased him by taking much of the trouble of the house upon himself."

"I see," said Florence abruptly, after some moments spent in thought—painful thought, as it appeared,—"that he, and he alone, can aid us with any hope of profit. Will you call on him immediately—explain everything—consult as to the best mode of proceeding, and say that Miss Lyle trusts he will excuse the liberty she takes in asking him, for her father's sake, to fill her father's place till his recovery."

Mr. Walton looked at her in trouble and surprise by no means pleasing to Florence. The message, considering Mr. Gordon's former footing in the family, little less than son and brother to the father and daughter, sounded to him as cold and strange: moreover, it was delivered rather proudly, and was scarcely calculated to win the assistance so earnestly de-

sired. Other considerations made the proposition still more unpalatable.

"Do you not think, Miss Lyle, it would be better to see him yourself? It is no pleasant task which you wish him to undertake, and, of course, your influence is greater than mine. He would naturally expect a personal request, rather than a formal message. And do you not think it would be as well that my name should not appear in the matter? I would do anything to serve you and your esteemed father; but the knowledge that the information came from me might lessen its value, and uselessly provoke the enmity of Mr. Sawyer. You can tell Mr. Gordon everything when he calls."

A slight feeling of contempt curled her lip for an instant, but it was rebuked and repressed. Mr. Walton had been her grandfather's clerk—had watched the growth of her father and herself with a friendly interest—and during his long life not a word had been breathed against his honesty, whilst his anxiety

for the credit and prosperity of the house had ever been conspicuous. Timid and cautious as a young man, an experimental knowledge of the deceitfulness of the world, was not likely to make him less cautious as an old one. He had already acted contrary to his usual habits and confirmed character: she owed him much for what she plainly saw he considered an act of imprudence, and she was bound in return to spare him all needless anxiety or risk of injury.

"Mine was but the judgment of the young, Mr. Walton; yours is the wise counsel of age. Since you wish it, your name shall not appear: I should be sorry to cause you anxiety. Write down every further particular which Mr. Gordon ought to know before his interview with Mr. Sawyer: after that, as my father's confidential clerk, an application to you for further details cannot awaken suspicion. You can then depart, and none will know of our meeting. As time presses, I shall request Mr. Gordon's presence immediately: the sending for him

openly to Atherton will convince Mr. Sawyer that he has proper authority to act."

"There seems the greatest difficulty, Miss Florence. Mr. Sawyer, knowing your father's state, may refuse to submit to Mr. Gordon's interference; and he seems so hurrying on matters, as far as I can learn, that a few days may do irreparable mischief."

"Do you suspect Mr. Sawyer of dishonesty then, as well as a dangerous taste for daring speculations?"

"Oh no, Miss Lyle! I did not say so much as that," replied Mr. Walton, absolutely terrified at her question, and looking round the room in dismay lest any should have heard her.

"Oh no, Mr. Walton! you did not say—you only think it;" and in spite of the increased cause for anxiety which that admission had occasioned, she could not quite prevent a smile at his alarm: but it was no time for smiles, and she resumed her gravity upon the instant.

"Suppose Mr. Sawyer should dispute Mr.

Gordon's right to interfere, though backed by my request, what measures can be pursued to establish the right, for delay might prove fatal to our hopes ?"

" I know nothing less than a full authority, signed with your father's name. If that could be obtained——" he said anxiously.

" Mr. Gordon shall have a full authority to act for my father, signed Robert Lyle," replied Florence firmly after a moment's consideration.

" Then you will inform Mr. Lyle !" was his joyful exclamation.

For an instant the extremity of the peril was forgotten, and an arch smile, such as had not been seen for many a day, illumined her features, lending them a beauty little less than dazzling in the old man's eyes.

" Do you remember once paying an order for one hundred pounds, signed Robert Lyle ? Yet my father said he had not signed it."

"It was a fearful trial!" said the cautious clerk in grave alarm and no little shame, turning away from her arch glance.

"It was not a wise one possibly, though my dear father did not scold."

"Then surely you will not repeat it?"

"Ask no questions, Mr. Walton; then knowing nothing, you cannot be considered an accomplice."

"Why, it is forgery!—some have been hanged for as little," exclaimed the timid Walton, forgetting prudence and politeness in his terror at the proposition of a crime so peculiarly horrible in the eyes of merchants and merchants' clerks.

"I will run the risk," said Florence with an encouraging smile. "It can do harm to none, may prevent loss to many, and check dishonesty. You shall write what you consider a full and sufficient authority," she added coaxingly, seeing that he still looked grave. "The faculties of the sick, you know, are not as clear

as those in health, and the authority might not be sufficient, so you shall dictate the paper to be signed Robert Lyle.—It must be so! I will have my way for once," she continued with graceful peremptoriness, placing the paper before him, and the pen in his hand. Still he hesitated.

"It may hereafter bring trouble to Mr. Gordon."

Florence started, and pondered on his words; but though they occasioned uneasiness, they effected no change in her resolution.

"I will thank you to write, Mr. Walton. My father will sanction whatever his daughter may have approved of or done; and I hope to obtain Mr. Gordon's pardon hereafter."

Her decided manner admitted of no further dispute, and with a sigh and grave shake of the head his pen was dipped in the ink; but before it touched the paper he ventured on the suggestion of one more difficulty.

"Mr. Gordon's money is left in our house,

and though not a large sum, yet, being his all, he may fear to risk it. To pay it on the instant is scarcely possible; and should he demand it before he will act, Mr. Sawyer may avail himself of that demand to cause delay, by objecting to pay it without Mr. Lyle's order This would defeat your plan; and I know not how to advise you to give him a legal security, as a lawyer must then be employed and made acquainted with all, or would guess it: besides, Mr. Lyle's real signature must then be obtained. What can be done?" he asked, alarmed at his own suggestion.

"Nothing! and nothing need be done, Mr. Walton. You do not understand Mr. Gordon's character, or you would not have imagined such a difficulty. The risk of his own money will never cause him one moment's thought, in comparison with my father's greater interests; and should the worst come that may, he shall be no loser. My mother's settlement will be mine when I come of age, and Florence

Lyle will never touch one shilling whilst her father's creditors remain unpaid. I will not insult Mr. Gordon by naming the subject to him."

"I dare say you are right," said Mr. Walton, shrinking at her indignant defence of Gordon.

Florence did not know till some time after that all Mr. Walton's money, the savings of a whole life of honest industry, ran the same risk as Gordon's:—yet he had not thought of himself.

Another half-hour was employed in writing the authority and every requisite information; then, resuming his slouched hat, Mr. Walton followed his fair guide, who, leading him through unfrequented paths, let him out at a wicket by a master-key, close to the high road, without, to his great delight, his having encountered a human being.

"I have but little time to thank you, Mr. Walton," pressing his hand. "We owe you

more than we can repay, and must be your debtors through life. My father will, I trust, hereafter convince you of our gratitude."

"Do not speak of it, Miss Florence: I would do more—much more, if I had the power. I hope your father will soon be restored to health, and then all will go well. I will not detain you now. Good morning." He turned to depart, desirous of hiding the emotion which her kind words and tearful eyes had awakened, and anxious, if truth must be told, not to be seen within some distance of Atherton; yet he had not gone many steps, before he returned, and was rejoiced to find her still engaged in locking the gate.

"You will copy that paper of mine, Miss Florence, will you not? And I certainly think it would be as well not to name me."

"Both shall be as you wish," said Florence, suppressing a smile at his caution.

"Thank you, Miss Florence. Keep up your spirits, and all will go well."

"I hope it will."

"Keep up my spirits!" thought Florence as she retraced her steps to the house. "He little knows how much there is to keep them down. But I must act now: thoughts and regrets will come unbidden soon enough.

CHAPTER V.

"They met!—"

"TELL James to saddle one of the horses to take him to Fairport immediately, and let me know when he is ready to go," was her order to the only servant she encountered as she passed up to her own dressing-room.

Her first care on entering was to lock the door and prevent intrusion, lest any curious eye should rest upon her. She shed no tears, but her frame shook and she breathed with difficulty. After a time, she became more calm than an observer of her late emotion could have anticipated; but her cheek flushed and faded as her trembling fingers in vain tried to guide the pen with a hope of another's

understanding the meaning of its unsteady strokes.

"This is no time for weakness," she murmured in a low voice, hiding her face in her hands, whilst her lips breathed a silent but fervent prayer.

Again she resumed the pen and attempted to write. The fingers were tolerably steady, but now the feebleness and wavering of the mind became apparent. Line after line was begun—blotted out, or torn off; and her task was no nearer completion. One address was too formal — another displeased her from some other cause, and her cheek changed as she wrote and then destroyed it.

"If you please, ma'am, James is ready," said the housemaid through the closed door.

Florence started, ashamed of her weakness.

"Wait in the dining-room, and I will give you my note in ten minutes; and let no one make a noise, lest they should disturb my father."

Within ten minutes the note was concluded. It did not please her, but she dared delay no longer. Could she have so arranged it, her note would have had neither beginning nor ending;—that is, such a beginning or ending as is in general use, for in those seemed the principal difficulty: yet to write in the third person was too cold and formal to be thought of With a beginning she did dispense,—to a conclusion she was compelled to submit.

"To Walter Gordon, Esq.

"It is in your power to be of essential service to my father, who is unequal to exertion at present. Do I err in believing that you will not withhold your assistance? If I do not, you will visit Atherton immediately, as delay may accomplish what the utmost promptness alone can prevent.

"Yours truly,

"Florence Lyle."

Such were the contents of the note, delivered to the servant with a steady hand, accompanied with the order to make all possible haste and return the instant he received an answer. As the sound of the hoofs of the departing horse struck on her ear, Florence made an involuntary movement towards the door, as if to recall the note; then, ashamed of her weakness, she retreated again to her seat. The interval before the return of her messenger might possibly have been spent in recollections and anticipations ill calculated to fit her for the expected meeting; but there was enough in the work yet before her to occupy her time, and she knew her own feebleness.

To allow her mind to dwell on the remembrance of the past, or on the probable effects of the coming meeting, would but unnerve her for the approaching trial. There was yet much to be done and endured, for which nights of watching and anxiety, and the shock of the morning's tale, had been but poor preparatives.

This meeting once over, her tears might have their way, and she find relief from their flowing: at present, this must not be. She had said she would do her duty in the might of a strength that was not her own,—it was to that strength that she now looked for aid.

Staying the wild throbbing of her heart as she best could, and forcing thought to obey her will, she seated herself at a desk in her boudoir, after giving express orders that she should be instantly informed of her messenger's return. With a hand not more unsteady than might well befit an invalid, she copied the authority on which Gordon was to act; and, when completed, so exact was the resemblance to her father's writing, that few—very few could have detected what Walton called a forgery. She put it from her with a sigh. Though believing the act fully justified by the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed, still she could not but regret its necessity. That her father would approve of

all she did, and that Gordon's abilities—and, she believed, zeal—were fully equal to the emergency, she did not doubt; but still there was a duplicity in the act from which her frank and noble spirit recoiled, and she trembled lest she should incur Gordon's contempt and blame for the proceeding. Yet without that authority Mr. Sawyer might seem warranted in refusing to heed his counsel or submit to his control; and to tell Gordon that Robert Lyle had not signed the paper to which his name was affixed, was to make him a partner in the deception, and place him in a more awkward situation than herself. No! the paper must be given: it was what her father would do were he better; —it was but anticipating his intentions; — it could harm none;—it would, she hoped, benefit many. Gordon alone would have a right to complain; but she would take all the blame upon herself, as hers it was;—and would he not forgive her? Her heart beat quicker at the question, and she dared not ask it why.

The authority was put aside, and she began to copy Walton's other paper. Surely the spirit of the writer lingered with the writing; for no sooner had she begun the task, than, like its author, she saw fresh difficulties at every line. If Walton's visit and interference were to be concealed, how was she to account for her knowledge of Gordon's presence at Fairport and his place of abode? whilst to pass off the explanatory paper as her own, besides being a deception from which she shrunk, would be a folly, as the attempt must be useless. These things had been overlooked by Walton in his personal caution, and she knew not how to remedy the omission.

As the authority would naturally pass for her father's, Gordon might believe the explanatory paper written by his dictation; but should he ask the question, what was she to do? An interview with Gordon under any circumstances would be distressing; how much more so one of her own seeking, embarrassed as she would be

by the consciousness of deception and the fear of being led into falsehood! To command even tolerable composure would require no ordinary exertion of self-control. To think over these difficulties was but to increase her doubts and fears; so she wrote on steadily and thoughtfully. When the trial came, she must hope it would be less severe than she anticipated.

Much must depend on Gordon's manner. It was long since they had parted,—parted with mutual wishes for each other's welfare, calmly and politely expressed, but with not even a hinted desire on either side that they should ever meet again. During the interval he might have greatly changed—she thought that she at least was changed. Perhaps he would excuse himself upon the plea of urgent business of his own:—but speculation must be vain—a short time would decide the point. Her manner must depend on his.

She had but just transcribed the last line,

and her pen was still on the paper, when the trampling of a horse at full speed made her start. It must be her messenger. She had not dared to hope so speedy a return. Perhaps Gordon was gone; or had he sent a verbal message? A light and hurried tread was heard in the adjoining library,—the door of the boudoir opened gently, and Walter Gordon stood before her—his dark hair disordered, his cheek flushed with exercise and excitement, his eye full of the fire of a stirred mind, and his whole appearance furnishing proof of the speed with which he had ridden. There was not a trace of coldness or restraint in his manner.

Florence, uttering an exclamation of surprise, advanced to meet him; then, feeling that she trembled, stopped abruptly: but he too had advanced, and seeing her agitation, led her to a seat, speaking kindly and soothingly.

"Forgive me, Miss Lyle, for entering thus suddenly and unannounced. You have suf-

fered much of late, and your constant watching may well make you nervous. Shall I procure you a glass of water?"

"No, no," she said, struggling for composure. "I am well now, and this is very silly;—but I did not expect you so soon."

"Not expect me so soon! Did you suppose I would delay an instant? Fortunately my horse was at the door, and I only stayed to ask after your father, fearing, from your summons, that he might be worse. I heard he was better—out of all danger; and you, I hope, will confirm the report."

"Thank Heaven, I can! He is no longer in danger, but still very weak, and must suffer much;" and the large tears rolled down her cheek.

"I rejoice to hear of his amendment," replied Gordon, turning away as he spoke; but she knew he felt with her and for her.

She strove for calmness, and she was calm; but the silence was becoming painful, and she spoke.

"I fear you have not breakfasted, Mr. Gordon. Will you allow me to offer you refreshments?"

He turned abruptly from the window and approached her. He too had been striving for calmness, and he too was calm,—or calmer, we should say: but there was nothing of formality or coldness; on the contrary, he was too much excited to have his feelings under such strict control as he might have desired.

"Refreshments, Miss Lyle! Do you think I could partake of them till I had learned how I could serve your father?" he asked reproachfully. "I had hoped that you better understood my esteem for Mr. Lyle,—my zeal for his welfare."

"I doubt not your esteem for my father," replied Florence, as he thought rather coldly, and he answered with a warmth bordering on emotion.

"Nor should you doubt my zeal for his welfare, or for that of his daughter. Do but put me to the proof;—task me as highly as you

will, you shall not find me wanting. If I showed what some considered ingratitude or obstinacy in leaving your father's roof, do not you believe that it was either: there were reasons,—you may guess them:—I dare not——But it is worse than idle talking of the past," he added, checking himself abruptly and then speaking more calmly. "I came at your summons in the hope of serving your father:—will you tell me how I can be of use?"

He took the seat to which her hand motioned him, and waited her reply in silence. If, thinking the request she was going to make embarrassing, she was considering how to introduce it naturally and gracefully, her consideration was of slight advantage, for her answer was abrupt and hurried, as though, finding herself incapable of a progressive explanation, she entered on the difficult subject at once, ashamed of her long silence and despairing of a better commencement. Perhaps, too, she fancied impatience in his looks, and that

he desired the interview should not be unnecessarily prolonged; and perhaps she spoke a little—a very little proudly.

"I will not detain you, Mr. Gordon, with long apologies for seeking your assistance: I will but say, that we are aware we have not the slightest claim on your kindness, and beg you to believe that should you on explanation feel the least reluctance to undertake what must be an unpleasant task, we shall consider you more than justified in declining its embarrassments, and only regret the losing the services of one of whose talents we entertain so high an opinion."

"Miss Lyle, you do not know me as I am—you do not judge me as I should be judged. No difficulty, no annoyance, no danger, can counterbalance my pleasure in serving you or Mr. Lyle. I shrink from nothing but your suspicions of my zeal."

"Pardon me, Mr. Gordon, if I have said anything to hurt you," replied Florence in a

low and faltering voice, touched by his warmth and strong emotion. "Believe me, no one can think more highly of a human being than my father does of you. Not accustomed to ask favours, and of such importance, I fear I feel a little proudly on the occasion; but I cannot —I do not doubt the sincerity of your regard for my father, and I will no longer hesitate to state our difficulties."

"Thank you!" he said earnestly; then, as if afraid to say more, bowed respectfully and waited the promised communication.

Florence felt the danger of thought on the present occasion and proceeded.

"It is of Mr. Sawyer that I would speak—it is to check his rage for daring speculations, to use no harsher term, that your assistance has been requested. My father, unhappily, as you know, is unable to take part in the business of the house at present; and should Mr. Sawyer continue in his course, difficulties and embarrassments may arise beyond our power to ac-

commodate. I am no woman of business, Mr. Gordon, and doubt if I shall make myself understood; but perhaps this paper will explain my fears."

Gordon perused the statement with attention, and Florence watched him as he read.

"You do not think our alarm without a cause," she said as he looked up from the paper.

"I see that I could not lull you into security if I wished it," he replied. "My countenance always tells too much or too little. According to my former knowledge of the affairs of your house and the present aspect of the mercantile world, I consider many of these arrangements highly imprudent; but I hope—nay, believe, that all material danger may be averted. I speak in plainness and sincerity, Miss Lyle; and trust you have no cause for alarm, now that the peril is acknowledged, and prompt and decided measures can be taken to avoid it. A further delay might have made prudence and

decision of no avail, as I am inclined to think that the danger has been permitted to advance to a perilous proximity of that point at which interference would be hopeless. Mr. Sawyer is not a man to be trusted."

"I feared so; but my father entertains a high opinion of him."

"He did; but, of course, he cannot do so now. Were I to laud your talents for business on the evidence of this paper, I suspect it is a compliment which you neither deserve nor would accept. Though in Miss Lyle's writing, I am much mistaken if I cannot trace in the cautious construction of some of the phrases the constitutional prudence of my friend Walton. Kind, honest, timid man! He feared lest his *t*'s and his *g*'s should stand as an evidence against him, so compelled you to the unintellectual task of copying a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. Am I not correct?" he asked with a smile.

"You gentlemen never will allow our sex

the ability of understanding the science of figures. I doubt if Mr. Walton would thank you for the supposition, so as you value his favour do not hint your belief," she replied with an answering smile, beginning to hope that his penetration would save her from some of her dreaded difficulties, whilst of his willingness — nay, eagerness to serve her father, she was now convinced.

"I am delighted at your having heard of my arrival at Fairport last night, since my presence may prove useful; but I was not aware that it had been so widely bruited," he continued in the same playful manner. "I had intended to ride over this morning to inquire after Mr. Lyle, of whose illness I had not heard till I saw Walton. But perhaps you know all this?"

"To state the extent or the source of knowledge, is to lower it in the opinion of the multitude."

"I shall at least pique myself on my penetration, since you do not forbid me," he replied

"And now, perhaps, as there is no time to lose, I had better consult with Mr. Lyle and receive his directions how to act."

"My dear father is too ill to be consulted on business—particularly such important business. The slightest anxiety or excitement might produce a relapse."

She spoke hurriedly, looking down; but she felt his anxious, searching gaze upon her, and her cheek flushed. The deception she was practising embarrassed her: she wished him to guess the truth, though she could scarcely tell it.

"The knowledge alone must cause anxiety;—consulting with me would rather diminish than increase it," he remarked with quickness.

Florence spoke not, but her colour became still deeper: she felt that he was reading her meaning and her thoughts.

"You would not so decidedly forbid a consultation with your father without a sufficient reason, and I will urge it no more," he said

at length. "But it is a great,—I might say, an awful responsibility, which you wish me to undertake. My powers, though all exerted to their utmost, may prove unavailing: it is not in man to command success, and my endeavours may scarcely merit it. Mr. Sawyer will oppose and blame all my proceedings; and should I fail, your father too may censure my presumption. It is a great responsibility!"

Florence looked up. It was scarcely possible to believe that a few moments could have wrought such a change. The flush, the brightness of excited feeling had passed away: the cheeks were of a deathly hue, the eye fixed, the whitened nostril expanded, the voice low but deep, and the lips through which his words issued showed in their compression a firm yet anxious resolve. There was no mistaking—all indicated the disappointment of some hope, and the decision of a noble spirit that would not waver though it felt its all was laid upon one cast.

Florence trembled "It is a great responsibility, Mr. Gordon, and I know it;—yet I cannot lessen it. Do you shrink from it?" she asked earnestly but with downcast eyes. "You are not bound by anything that you have said."

"No, Miss Lyle, I will shrink from nothing which you wish me to undertake. Should I fail,"—and his voice was unsteady,—"you at least, I hope, will do me justice."

"I trust that you will not fail, Mr. Gordon: but if you should, our gratitude will not be less; and we shall bear our trial better, knowing that all which man can do will have been done."

Gordon took the hand she held towards him, with a look of gratitude and confidence; pressed, dropped it suddenly, and turned away. Neither spoke for some time: Gordon was the first to break the silence.

"I will not detain you longer from your father, but seek Mr. Sawyer instantly. If I require further information, I must innocently

ask Mr. Walton if he can furnish it, I conclude:" and he tried to smile.

"Yes," said Florence, making a similar attempt.

"The great difficulty will be in inducing Mr. Sawyer to admit my right to interfere," he remarked thoughtfully. "I must be reserved and mysterious, and stake his character for probity on his not shrinking from such an interference. But he is no simpleton."

"Will not this authority silence all dispute?" holding it towards him, but with a trembling hand and without venturing to meet his look.

His eye ran rapidly over the contents, and then, she was aware, was fixed on her. He started, but asked no question—made no remark.

"Is that sufficiently full?" she ventured to ask in a husky voice.

"More than sufficiently full! it breathes of Walton's cautious foresight."

"You have read it—you understand it. Will you undertake the responsibility on the strength of such a document,—will you act on that authority?" she asked; and though the blush of shame still lingered on her cheek, her voice was steady, and she looked up and met his gaze, wishing him to comprehend that she had nothing further to conceal.

"I have read it—I understand it, and will incur the responsibility. I would act on the authority of that signature though it urged me on to death. I neither pause nor doubt: I ask —I desire no more."

"I need not assure you that my father will hereafter, let what may come, acknowledge all which that paper contains, and fulfil any arrangements that you may make," she replied with quickness.

"I do not doubt it—or if I did, I should still act as I now do. I entreat you to stay all further anxiety, and rely on my utmost exertions."

"I do. My father will hereafter thank you; —repay you we cannot."

"I thank you for this confidence—it shall not be misplaced; but you can owe me nothing—all I can do will never balance your father's kindness. I will not intrude upon you longer now, or for some days. All the time which you can be persuaded to spare from your father, you will require for rest and quiet: but you shall hear the result of my first meeting with Sawyer, and have daily notice of our proceedings. Do not, I entreat you, give way to fears: it is my firm belief that all will be well. Promise me that you will immediately seek repose: for your father's sake, I ask you to be careful of yourself."

"Fear nothing for me! I will be very careful and prudent for my father's sake, as you desire."

"Good morning! I will no longer detain you. I leave it to you to tell Mr. Lyle the pleasure I feel in serving him."

"He shall hear that, and all, as soon as I dare venture."

"I did not mean to hasten your communication, but I hope he will soon be beyond your anxiety. Do not ring—it might disturb him."

Their hands touched, and merely touched, at parting; and Gordon left the room glad, Florence thought, that the meeting was concluded.

"Be careful of myself for my father's sake—he will do all for him," murmured Florence sadly when his departing steps were no longer heard.

But other steps approached, and taking up a book, she endeavoured to appear engaged in its perusal, when the friendly physician entered the room.

"Is this keeping your promise?" he asked reproachfully. "Instead of sleeping, you have been walking and talking, they tell me, since I forbade you to be nurse; and are none the better for it, as I can see. No excuses, but do better

for the future, or I shall lock your father's door against you. You left me pale and languid, and now are flushed and feverish. I must prescribe for you too," shaking his head at her pulse. "No wonder our trade thrives, when people will be obstinate. Go to your room, take what I shall send you, and sleep as long as you can. Your father is not yet awake, so off with you."

Florence would have explained and remonstrated, but it was of no use. The kind, blunt doctor, who had known her from a child, would listen to nothing. He led her to her room—saw her take the composing draught—sent old nurse to put her to bed, and then departed.

CHAPTER VI.

Fernando. You cannot mean this stripling should command me?
Beatrice. I am a simple woman, good my lord,
And oft mean nothing!
Fer. Then I shall rule as I have ruled before.
Bea. My lord will act as is consistent with his honour.
Fer. What gives the boy a right?
Bea. Doth he not show a warrant?

It was late in the day when Florence woke, and learnt from old nurse, who was watching her slumbers, that her father, after waking once and taking nourishment, had again fallen into a quiet sleep.

"And I not there when he awoke!"

"Well, Miss Florence, and what then? My master said it did him more good to hear that you was sleeping than to see your sweet face;

and I am sure you was not fit for much when the doctor sent you to bed. Mr. Gordon should have knowed better than to have kept you talking all that time, when he knew that you had been up all night."

"It was my own doing: Mr. Gordon was not to blame."

"Maybe not: it is not often that he is. I wish he had never gone; for, to my mind, you have not looked so happy since, except when with master. Lords may be fine things, but Walter Gordon is worth a dozen of them. I can't think why he went, when every one wished him to stay. Why, you are all in a tremble still, Miss Florence, and your cheek is getting red again: I must send for Doctor Woolston."

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Sawyer is in the library and wishes to see you," said the lady's maid, entering the room on hearing voices.

"My compliments to Mr. Sawyer; I am but

just awake, and too much engaged with my father to see any one. And be sure that no message is taken to your master; he must not be disturbed on any account."

"Yes, ma'am;" and the servant left the room without any suspicion of her mistress's vexation at Mr. Sawyer's visit.

"Mr. Sawyer will wait, ma'am. He is very sorry to trouble you, but, as he can't see my master, he must speak to you. He will not leave the house without." Such was the second message delivered by the maid.

"Say that I will be with him as soon as possible.—Tiresome—troubling me now," added Florence carelessly, to hide from those present her dread of the meeting, and its possible importance.

Florence was well aware of Mr. Sawyer's powers of penetrating and deluding, but positively to refuse the demanded interview might increase the suspicion which his visit showed, and which it was most material to lull. As she had not

yet heard what had passed between him and Gordon, all that she could do was to reveal nothing, and make the visit as brief as possible. Mr. Sawyer, having long ceased to receive anything from her but the merest common politeness, could now expect nothing more. Hurrying her toilet, she was soon ready to descend.

There was nothing in Mr. Sawyer to denote his penetration but the occasional sudden glancing of his clear, grey eye; nothing to hint his powers of deluding, but a winning smile, a soft voice, and an insinuating manner. There was nothing to warn you against him ;—no force of manner, speaking strength of character, whilst destroying the harmony of elegance; no personal beauty to excite envy, and yet no ugliness to disgust those who unwisely judge from externals. He did not compel to admiration, but won imperceptibly his way to influence. In figure he was short and slight, with pleasing, unmarked features; clear complexion, rather fully coloured; and well-shaped head, as

far as the intellectual organs only were concerned.

He was a popular—a very popular man. In his own rank in life there were few who did not speak well of him—fewer still who said ill of him. He was not one of those free, drinking, joyous, good-natured men, whom all join in lauding, though an admission of vice or folly may be tacked to that lauding; yet still might the world claim him wholly as its own. If he was not known to practise gross and open vices, he countenanced those who did, or his rebuke was too lukewarm to reform; and when he served, it was never to his own possible detriment. He might utter a fine sentiment on a fitting occasion—he never acted one. He might deny another—he never denied himself. His talents for business were indisputable, and no one excelled him in flattery; yet was he generally considered a sincere man. So delightful and delicate were his flatteries, that the self-love of the flattered was fully engaged to prove him candid.

Such was the person whom Florence met in the library with increased alarm and dislike, but with outward calmness. She knew much was at stake, and his penetrating eye saw in her manner nothing more than her usual cold politeness, and vexation at being summoned from her father.

Mr. Sawyer advanced to meet her with a gentle and courteous eagerness; inquired with interest after her health, hoping it had not suffered from nursing and anxiety; intimated that her brilliant beauty (the flush was still upon her cheek) rendered the question needless; and then led her gallantly to a seat, taking one beside her. To all this she submitted, but only submitted, taking no trouble to conceal her impatience.

"Now, having ascertained that you have not suffered from your dutiful and fond attention, I must congratulate you on Mr. Lyle's great and sudden amendment. It must be a source of pleasure to all his friends,—and who

is not his friend? But to a daughter—and such a daughter! it must be a happiness beyond expression. The sympathy with father and child has been universal: Mr. Lyle being so highly esteemed by all who know him."

"I rejoice in such a tribute to my father's worth, and accept the sympathy of friends with gratitude," said Florence, the tears starting to her eyes at this mention of her father, though guessing the speaker's purpose.

Her apparent good faith was a little surprising, but he continued.

"The high estimation in which your father is held can be nothing new to you, however delightful may be its repetition. When did Mr. Lyle's rapid amendment begin? I understood yesterday that he was scarcely out of danger."

"I was still anxious for him yesterday; today I am assured my fears may cease: but as he yet requires my care, you will, I hope, excuse me if I wish you good morning. I am impatient to take my station again at his side:—

indeed, I bade the servant tell you so," she added coldly.

"Your message was delivered: and perhaps I ought to apologise for again requesting an interview, and hurrying your toilet; but I had urgent reasons, which I hope will plead my excuse for this intrusion. I will no longer detain you, but accompany you to your father."

"Impossible, Mr. Sawyer! my father sleeps; or, if he does not, is unequal to receiving the visit of a stranger."

"A stranger perhaps, Miss Lyle; but you cannot consider me as such."

"My father is forbidden to see any one but me and his immediate attendants."

"That might be yesterday; but now that he is so much better, he will admit me, I have no doubt. I will wait till he wakes"

"Pardon me, Mr. Sawyer, but waiting would be useless: my father will not see you to-day."

"But I would speak to him on important business."

"So I imagined from your thus pressing a point which you cannot fail to see is unpleasant. Were our house on the eve of insolvency,—to put an extreme case,—you should not see my father to-day: I will not risk a relapse by permitting him to be excited by business."

Mr. Sawyer looked at her steadily, but she did not shrink or turn away. He felt himself baffled—her cool manner gave him little hope; and yet he scarcely believed the truth of the sudden amendment on which he had congratulated her.

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Miss Lyle, as my business with your father is of a pressing—a most pressing nature. Surely, if well enough to see Mr. Gordon, he might see me, whom he has known so much longer."

"Having endured one excitement, is scarcely a reason why an invalid should be subjected to another. I know not who informed

you that my father had seen Mr. Gordon; but I tell you candidly, that it will be of no use to urge this matter further; and it is unlike Mr. Sawyer's usual courtesy the having urged it so far. If we argue, you will gain the mastery in words; but, as you know, I do not follow as you would lead in acts. Once more, good morning:—I must attend my father."

He rather quailed at her pointed manner, yet prevented her departure.

"I know your firmness; but something has occurred this morning which makes it absolutely necessary that I should consult with Mr. Lyle, and your apparent ignorance of the fact but makes the consultation the more imperative. You are evidently not aware that Mr. Gordon has called on me and claimed a right to interfere in the arrangements of the house in a most extraordinary manner. Now, Mr. Gordon is a very sensible, and, I dare say, a very honourable young man,—but having left the house some time, he cannot have an accurate knowledge of

its present connexions and engagements, and I am inclined to think there must be some mistake. With all Mr. Lyle's fondness for him,—a just fondness, I have no doubt,—he could scarcely mean that he should check or alter engagements formed or forming. I am not touchy on these points," he added with a smile; "but even you must be aware that it is not customary to place a late clerk in control over a present partner."

"Of course, Mr. Sawyer, I can know little of these things; but has not Mr. Gordon some authority for acting?"

"He certainly does show a paper signed Robert Lyle; but, to say the best of it, it must have been gained from your father whilst labouring under some delusion. If I could converse with Mr. Lyle, I am convinced that he would not sanction Mr. Gordon's present proceedings."

"Does Mr. Gordon overstep his authority then?"

"Not perhaps the letter of the paper, if

you consider that his authority; but, in my opinion, he does its spirit. Could I see your father——"

"I have already said it is impossible," she replied, interrupting him.

"Then I must act on my own discretion, and decline admitting Mr. Gordon's interference," he answered quickly.

"On what plea, Mr. Sawyer? Was not the authority full and sufficient?"

"Perfectly so; but Mr. Lyle had not heard my explanations. In fact, Miss Lyle——" and he spoke as in embarrassment and pain, "I fear your father could scarcely be aware of what he was doing at the time he wrote that paper."

"What should make you think so?" she demanded rather haughtily.

"I would not pain you:—of course, I only mean a little confused by his illness. The whole proceeding is so extraordinary—so unprecedented, that I can account for it in no other way. The writing is so firm for a sick

man—tolerably firm even for one in health, and yet you do not deem him well enough to converse on business! The more I think, the more I am perplexed; whilst Mr. Gordon's sudden arrival increases the singularity."

"Knowing my impatience to be with the invalid, you might have spared me this discussion; whilst your conjectures and remarks seem so contradictory as almost to prove the confusion of ideas of which you accuse my father. If Mr. Lyle knew not what he did, it is strange that the authority should have been so clear and full: if he did know, it is not extraordinary, with his energy when roused, that he should write for a short time distinctly. Why you hesitate to admit of Mr. Gordon's interference, as you term it, or why you find it unpleasant, you best know. Of his honour and ability you can have no suspicion, and his zeal for the interests of our house admit of as little doubt. His being justified in claiming to be informed of and consulted in all affairs of that house, his

written authority fully proves; and I should have thought, that in these perilous times, when my father cannot attend, a person whom I have heard utter such delicate sentiments of honour as yourself would have felt it a relief, rather than an annoyance, to divide the responsibility with another—that other so highly regarded by your partner."

"Certainly, as you say, a great relief," he replied, turning away from her lofty look. "But the truth is," forcing a smile, "perhaps, without knowing it, I am a little touchy; and it does seem something like a suspicion—I will not say an insult—the empowering so young a man to control my actions, and that without any particular occasion;—the placing an inferior over me, as I said before—a clerk above a partner."

"I am sorry you should see it in that light, as the deed is done and cannot be undone," she replied very coldly. "Mr. Gordon, being empowered, must and will act."

"If I could be quite certain that the paper was Mr. Lyle's! — wholly his!" — he broke forth, fixing his keen, clear eyes upon her.

"What am I to understand by this, Mr. Sawyer?" demanded Florence, standing before him in the full majesty of indignation, for his perseverance told her that Gordon's suspicions were not groundless.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lyle; I meant nothing that could offend you," he replied humbly and gently, recalled to a sense of his imprudence by her question. "I am shocked at my rudeness, though unintentional; but I own I am chafed in this matter. I thought Mr. Lyle would never have given such an authority without first informing me; and then I fear that Mr. Gordon's views and mine do not coincide: his ideas are rather confined; and he is so determined to enter into the most minute particulars, that the time for action passes by before he has decided."

"That is novel! Mr. Gordon was always

noted for his quickness of apprehension and promptness in action."

"All do not see alike, Miss Lyle. To be candid, I foresee great embarrassment and loss to the house from his interference."

"We are willing to abide the peril!"

"I should at least wish to converse with Mr. Lyle before the authority is acted on."

"As I have already said that cannot be, Mr. Sawyer; and, to be as candid as yourself, this anxiety on the subject does not look well. There can be nothing in the affairs of my father's house, as far as he is concerned, which he would not wish Mr. Gordon to understand; and it is only by understanding them that he can act with effect or judgment. Should his over-caution, as you hint, occasion loss, no blame can rest on you: my father will abide by the authority given in that paper, and should loss really occur, will take care that the innocent suffer no wrong. Act Mr. Gordon

must and will. If you disapprove, you can protest, but must not impede; and in a few days I hope my father will be sufficiently recovered, even in the eyes of his fearful child, to converse on business. Again, good morning: my station should be in the sick chamber. I must apologise for not ringing the bell, for fear of disturbing the invalid; but you will find the servant in the hall:" — and bowing coldly, she quitted the room, leaving her visitor in no enviable state of mind.

He was baffled in every scheme, thwarted in every plan, and it required some consideration to decide on his future course.

Nor was Florence much better pleased with the interview. It had been of a more decided character than she had wished or expected. The falling off in his usual powers of persuasion — his evident anxiety — his presence, continued even to rudeness,—all these could not but alarm her; they were convincing proofs that the apprehended danger was far from visionary,

and she awaited Gordon's expected note with impatience.

Its contents were calculated to reassure her. He thought he could say with certainty that a trifling loss was the worst to be apprehended, since the threatened danger was seen and might thus by prudence be averted. Mr. Sawyer's hesitating manner and hinted opposition had at first caused him to believe matters worse than they really were; but, since his return from Atherton, of which visit he had himself informed him, with well-acted frankness he appeared to have laid aside all idea of opposing, and explained and consulted — persuaded or acknowledged rashness with a candour and freedom very pleasing, whatever might be its motive. He hoped she would soon be as free from all anxiety on her father's account, as she might now be from all dread of Mr. Sawyer's powers of doing mischief;—he would write again the next day ; and he ended by entreating that she would be careful of her own health for the

sake of her friends. The messenger had orders to make particular inquiries of old nurse concerning her father and herself.

The note was more than polite—it was friendly, showing a desire to remove fears, and yet there was a slight contraction of her brow as she perused it. What more could she desire? Are our desires always bounded by reason? Mine are not: I know not whether my readers' may be.

She returned a note of thanks in the self-same tone as his, she pleased herself in believing.

I wonder if Walter Gordon was more pleased with the note from Florence Lyle, than Florence Lyle had been with the note from Walter Gordon.

CHAPTER VII.

"Whene'er I give one sunny hour,
Your cloud comes o'er to shade it;
Whene'er I plant one bosom's flower,
Your mildew comes to fade it."

"One comes, another goes!
One smiles, another sighs!—
And thus the world creeps on!"

Day after day did Florence with the touching watchfulness of affection sit beside the sick man's couch; and when the father met that loving look, he almost thought that he could not die whilst that fond glance was turned upon him. Such fervent, such untiring love! Oh, it must be as a shield to guard,—making that home

blessed to him on whom it rested! Her look of affection was the last thing to meet his closing eyes, their lids drooping slowly as if reluctant to shut out what they still longed to gaze upon; her look of affection was the first thing to meet his eyes when they unclosed, whilst her gentle and watchful ministering robbed the sick chamber of its horrors and its weariness. Nor was his child's care unrewarded. Her love would have brought its own reward;—when does it not? His looks, that followed her with a father's fondness when she moved with noiseless step across the room, would have been a sufficient recompence for all her watching and her fears; but she was to have another—a richer reward. Day by day, as she sat by his side, she could trace his amendment more rapid than could have been expected — almost equal to her sanguine hopes. At the end of a little more than a week, after having playfully parried his inquiries concerning business, and insisted on his not seeing Mr. Sawyer, she told

him all that had occurred; placed the notes Gordon had sent to her before him, doing full justice to his skill and ability, of which she had heard from Walton; and then clasping her arms round his neck as she knelt before him, and hiding her blushing face upon his shoulder, she asked for pardon with a witching mingling of play and earnestness.

"Now you know all, my own dear papa; will you forgive me?—or must I really be hanged for forgery, as timid Mr. Walton threatened?"

"My child! my own sweet Florence!" pressing her fondly to his heart; "what do I not owe you for this prudence and decision? You have saved my life;—more, my honour. I could not have borne the disgrace of a failure."

"I trust that you will never have to bear it, my dear father; but if trials come, the prayers of the humble will win strength to bear them."

"I know that, though I fear I do not think

so often on these matters as I should. But to see you a beggar,—you, my good! my beautiful! you, who should sit amid the noble and the great! — high amid the highest! I could not bear it, Florence."

"I should have your love, my father, and we should still be all to each:—I ask no more. Your child has no wish for pomp."

The father held her more closely to him; but he did not speak — he could not: her simple and entire affection was a gentle rebuke to the mingling of pride that alloyed his. But how could a father fail to be proud of such a child? Must he not wish that she should take her place among the noble and the great,—in that station for which her grace and loveliness—her lofty and enlightened mind—so well befitted her? Alas, that the human heart should thus deceive itself! Could a coronet give greater lustre to her beauty? — could a title more exalt her mind?—could the homage of crowds shield her from misfortune, save her

from pain? Will not sorrow come where gauds and jewels shine? Will not satiety eat happiness itself away, if the soul hath sought but the things of earth, and earth hath given its all? May not a breaking heart beat beneath the vest of cloth of gold,—an aching brow beneath a coronet? Ay may they; as often—oftener it may be—than beneath the simple robe and braided hair. And what are the riches of this world to the heart's hoarded wealth? — the pageantries of pomp, the flatteries of the crowd, to the meeting one fond look—one word of true affection?

"On my word, Florence, but you are a brave bold girl!" he said after a while, putting her from him a space and sating his proud love by gazing on her. "I thought I prized you as you deserved before, but I knew not half your merit. Who could have expected such thought and decision from a simple girl,—a blushing girl too, who, one might almost think, had been telling a tale about her

lover? You tremble still: why, I must pet you more than ever."

"Can you?"

"You are saucy, Florence;" pressing his lips on her upturned brow, whilst a tear fell on her cheek, at her touching yet playful question. "And Gordon, where is he? We must try and thank him. He is all I thought him before those fancies came across his mind. We must lure him to remain with us. You shall try your persuasions;—he cannot resist those—he must leave us no more. Write and summon him directly. I long to tell him that I have ever loved him as a son. How is he looking?—well?"

"I believe so; but I have seen him only once, and was then too anxious to take much account."

"What! has he never called since?"

"He has written every day, as you can see, and called two or three times to inquire of nurse, but would not have me summoned from your room."

"That is like him. Walter Gordon was always thoughtful for others except in leaving us. But you should have insisted on his staying here: it was unkind and inhospitable not to do so, and you must have been very anxious and fearful for me not to have thought of it. You used to look upon Walter as a brother, and as such would I have you consider him."

"I was very anxious," she replied, turning away.

"I know it, my child, and did not mean to chide; but take your pen and write to him. I must recall that paper: it was a bold act, and there are few bold acts but have danger in them."

"Then I may be hanged after all?"

"We will try and obtain a pardon; but I must be watchful, or there will be two Robert Lyles in the firm. Well might Walton be terrified! Make haste, and write in your own name, remember."

Florence wrote, but not in her father's sight though in his room.

"Let me see the summons."

She handed the note.

"Is not this cold and formal, Florence, considering what we owe him?—for I conclude he knew his risk and who wrote that paper.—Not well written either; your hand must have been unsteady."

"Since you do not like it, let me write in your name."

"No indeed, Miss Lyle!" said her father gaily; "your taste for forgery is alarmingly on the increase. Can you not write a warmer invitation?"

"You shall dictate:—I generally endeavour to adopt the tone of my correspondent."

Mr. Lyle took up two of the notes lying before him: they chanced to be the first and the last. He had perceived no change on a regular perusal; but comparing these, only omitting the gradations, the coldness and re-

straint of the latter was sufficient to attract attention.

"He must have felt hurt at your not asking him here, Florence. So long an inmate of our house, such a step would have been natural and proper. No wonder he should have thought your omission unkind! Here, give me the pen—I will add a postscript Now send it off by a mounted messenger, for I am impatient to see him; and you must smile upon him, Florence. I know not how it is, but you two reverse the modes of the world: instead of being full of smiles when present and backbiting when absent, you laud each other to the skies when apart, but seem terrified at being too cordial when present. Has Walter offended you?"

"No, never."

"Then how is it? What makes you so cold?"

"A frigid temperament, I conclude, if it is as you say. The gentlemen, as you know, all accuse me of reserve and frigidity."

"Some of them, and perhaps with justice: but I thought that was only to keep the young puppies at a distance, who would have wooed your father's wealth without appreciating your own worth. But you can have no such motive towards Walter?"

"Certainly not!" replied Florence with an energy that must have silenced every doubt. "Habit, I suppose, my dear papa: you know that becomes our second nature."

"It was not always so, Florence; and you must forget your coldness in your gratitude."

Walter Gordon made no delay in obeying the summons; and if there was any doubt or hesitation in his manner as he crossed the hall and entered the invalid's apartment, it disappeared the instant he met Mr. Lyle's extended hand, and heard his warm and eager welcome.

"Walter, my boy," (once a boy, always a boy, in the speech at least, if not in the minds of some people,) "I know all!" still retaining his hand. "You have saved me from ruin,

and that too on a girl's authority, as I believe you knew, when a failure or my death might have brought you into trouble. This was kind — was noble: it was like your father. He saved my life—his son has saved my honour: you must look upon me as a parent. Come, Florence," placing her hand in Gordon's, "you shall help me to thank him;— henceforth he must be to you as a brother."

That cheeks should glow, and tears should start, and hands should tremble, at such a moment, was mere common-place — what must have been expected from any one with a touch of feeling. The hands of the new brother and sister were not coldly withdrawn; and Mr. Lyle was satisfied with Florence's manner to Walter, and Walter's manner to Florence. Were Walter and Florence themselves as well contented? All can ask questions—all cannot answer them.

Mr. Lyle was inclined to approve of all that Gordon had done; and when his proceedings

were more fully detailed a few days after by Walton, he was still louder in his praise and warmer in his gratitude. Gordon's firm but temperate conduct as regarded Mr. Sawyer—the quickness of his apprehension, the solidity of his judgment, and his clear and extended views of commerce in all its branches, had won the esteem and admiration not only of the timid clerk, but of all with whom he had transacted business. Mr. Lyle saw clearly the danger that had threatened his house, and did not scruple to show this knowledge to his partner, who, far from avoiding an explanation, was most urgent to give one at the first fitting moment. Accustomed, partly from a growing indolence and belief in the immensity of his riches—partly from his partner's wonderful powers of persuasion, to rely in most cases on his judgment and activity, Mr. Lyle felt more regret than anger at Mr. Sawyer's conduct, and listened to his explanations and arguments, mingled with frank admissions of

boldness in speculation and praises of Gordon, with very tolerable complacency; but he agreed with Walter that it would be prudent to dissolve the partnership as soon as convenient, and in the mean time to be more keen and cautious than he had been of late. In fact, nothing but the intention of entering into daring speculations, withdrawing large sums from safe investments for that purpose, could be proved against Sawyer; and though Walter believed him capable of fraud, as this was only a suspicion and not a certainty, Mr. Lyle retained a higher opinion of his partner than Florence or Gordon considered as his due.

"Walter had never liked him," Mr. Lyle said: "and there was no such great wickedness in admiring Florence, though she might look proud at his presumption."

Gordon again became an inmate of Atherton, to the delight of nurse, with whom he was an especial favourite, and of her associates also;—for his good temper, kindness, and considera-

tion had gained him the regard of those below as of those above him; though the buoyant gaiety which he had brought with him on his first arrival years before had sobered down into a thoughtfulness greater, as some said, than his age required. He was not a popular person in the same sense as Mr. Sawyer: he flattered none in wrong, he joined with none in error; he rebuked open vice when it dared to present itself before him. There were those who scoffed or sneered at his virtue and his poverty; but the oppressed and the timid looked to him for aid, and the haughty owned his superiority by an involuntary respect, whilst the noble-minded felt drawn towards him by a secret sympathy. Gordon had his faults; he was no perfect being—there is none such on earth: but his faults were not permitted or excused; he felt them—he mourned them—he strove against them. As a boy, though generally good-tempered, and even able to endure much provocation, once completely roused,

his passions were fearful: but his father had seen this, warned, chided, and encouraged, and early taught him the duties of self-denial and self-control. His ardent character—his young ambition, might—would have led him into sin: it was his father's care to turn his ardour and ambition towards higher objects than the pomps of earth, the mere pride of power,—to make him feel that he was a responsible being, accountable to God and man for the talents committed to his charge.

Whatever awkwardness or embarrassment he might at first have felt on again taking up his abode at Atherton, was soon dispelled by Mr. Lyle's friendly warmth and evidently increasing partiality. He consulted him in all things when Florence was not near or incapable of advising; and as he had only gaily and jestingly declined the honour when Mr. Lyle proposed his becoming a partner in his house, the merchant still hoped to detain him. He had noticed his scrupulous politeness to Florence on

every occasion, with her corresponding manner; and though they at first rarely conversed together, and there was not the free interchange of thought as in former times, he did not remark the deficiency,—nor did he see that gradually the politeness became a little less formally scrupulous, and their conversations much more frequent. Many days had elapsed since Gordon had resided at Atherton; — Mr. Lyle was nearly himself again, and the only material arrangement not completed was one with a correspondent some miles distant, to see whom Walter was to depart on the following morning.

The gentlemen had returned early from the counting-house, Florence still insisting on her father's not encountering much fatigue, and all were assembled in the boudoir. Florence had been engaged with her pencil, and Gordon immediately on his return had approached to observe her progress since the morning, and still lingered beside her, pointing out some particularly beautiful effects of light and shade on

the sloping lawn and rich woods visible from the window. Mr. Lyle glanced at them above his paper, and congratulated himself on the brotherly and sisterly affection growing up between them, at the very moment—short-sighted mortals as we are!—that their mutual feelings were the furthest removed from those befitting such a relationship.

The discussion on the lights and shadows of the landscape had given place to a still more interesting discussion on the lights and shades of character; then, partly reverting to their former theme, conjectures were ventured as to how far scenery can influence the mind; and Gordon, an enthusiastic admirer of nature, gave a brilliant and striking description of some scene which had struck him forcibly. Interested in his subject, and inspired by Florence's rapt attention, his glowing language placed that scene in all its beauty before her, till, yielding to the power of his eloquence, she forgot all beside, and for a time their spirits held communion

with each other. There was a brightness in her usually calm eye, and she was looking up at him with a lofty admiration, mingled with a beautiful and touching timidity, when the door was thrown open and Lord Clanellon was announced. Absorbed in his subject and not hearing the name, Gordon marked with surprise his fair listener's sudden start, her fading cheek, and her murmured exclamation — whether of fear or delight he could not tell,—and turning round to learn the cause of this emotion, he met Clanellon's look of concentrated hate. Before he could analyse the look, it was gone, and the intruder's graceful and courteous manner was calculated to dispose all to regard and admiration.

"Bless me, my lord! this is a pleasure!" said Mr. Lyle, advancing hastily to meet his guest, whom he greeted with the utmost warmth, making a thousand inquiries after the health of his parents and himself, all which his lordship answered with becoming thanks, in

return condoling with his host on his late illness with flattering earnestness.

"Quite well now, my lord, thanks to Florence, whom I have prevented from giving you a welcome."

"It is I who should beg Miss Lyle's pardon for my omission; but I know she will forgive any apparent inattention arising from my anxiety for her father," said Clanellon, advancing to Florence with the respectful confidence of one certain of being well received.

She gave the hand his extended one demanded; but the intruder had no difficulty in perceiving that his sudden appearance was *mal-apropos* — his visit most unwelcome. If she did not greet him with exactly the same chilling coldness which had so much annoyed him before, it was because her late excitement could not be completely subdued in an instant, and her vexation was too great not to ruffle her usual calm. Gordon saw nothing of this annoyance, as her face, from her rising, was

turned away; but he saw her give her hand—caught Clanellon's look of pleasure, his warm thanks for her inquiries after his mother, and his cheek paled at the sight, and his lofty enthusiasm died away.

"Your presence is doubly welcome to-day, my lord, since it affords me the pleasure of making you acquainted with Walter Gordon, to whom I am much indebted: that Walter Gordon whose portrait of Florence you so much admired. You must meet him as a friend, my lord, for I look upon him in the light of a son. Gordon, this is Lord Clanellon, of whom you have heard me speak so highly."

Whilst the introduction was taking place, the eye of each measured the other as if to estimate their mutual powers. Did they know—did they feel that they were rivals? The momentary scrutiny over, the impression left on the features of each was totally different. Clanellon's look expressed triumph and wrath, checked by involuntary respect: Gordon's showed a calm

and lofty dignity which could not be withstood; but there were marks of pain upon his lately animated features, and his lips were firmly compressed.

Florence found sufficient occupation in controlling or concealing her own emotion, and Mr. Lyle usually saw as he wished; so that this momentary scrutiny and instinct of dislike and rivalry were seen by neither, and were so completely the work of a minute, that when the introductory words were concluded, those introduced were ready with their bows. It might have been a matter of dispute to those who will wrangle about trifles, whose bow was most worthy praise: some might have preferred the one, and some the other; both were graceful: Clanellon's was more animated, Gordon's more dignified.

"I have great pleasure in knowing Mr. Gordon. One who is looked on by Mr. Lyle as a son, by his daughter as a brother, will, I trust, regard me as a friend," said Clanellon with

another graceful bow, and with that seemingly frank and animated manner for which he was remarkable, and which most found so winning.

Gordon replied only by a stately bend that told he understood, but was above his malice. Clanellon shrunk from the look and turned away. He would have given his favourite hunter, even in the height of the season, to have humbled Gordon before Florence, by making him feel an inferiority, or by rousing him to an unbecoming passion, whilst his own bearing should continue courteous and condescending; but, to the inward increase of his wrath, he was compelled to own that this could not be. He comprehended at once the scorn of Florence when she had said, "You patronise Walter Gordon?—You do not know him!"

He dared not venture on further insults under the mask of politeness. Gordon was above him, and this his penetration obliged him to admit. There was a dignity about him, the stamp of the nobility of nature, that command-

ed respect and compelled a truce, though it only made him more his foe. Contempt is a less powerful passion than is hatred. He was obliged to content himself with Gordon's look of pain as Mr. Lyle again expressed his pleasure at Clanellon's presence in such warm terms as clearly spoke his estimation, and even his wishes, to an ear quickened by its own hopes and fears.

Gordon left the room soon after; but Clanellon took no notice of his departure, continuing his exertions to interest Mr. Lyle and Florence, the latter of whom sat silent and apart.

It appeared as if Lord Clanellon's powers of pleasing were inexhaustible: he was the life of the dinner-table—his conversation was a spell. Mr. Lyle was in an ecstasy; and Florence, though complaining of a headache and at first looking little inclined to be amused, was at length compelled by his persevering brilliancy, unchecked by her coldness, to prove her admiration by her attention and occasional remarks

or questions; whilst even Gordon, who would have judged him harshly,

"As a critic, who himself is sore,"

and who saw in this very brilliancy the death-blow of his hopes, was forced to listen and admire. Had he chosen to enter the lists as his competitor, Clanellon's laurels might have been unwon—at least, in the lady's eyes; though his lordship's greater knowledge of the world, his confidence in his own powers, and his unscrupulous drawing upon fancy to embellish his tales, founded on fact, would have given him a superiority in some respects; whilst Gordon's greater depth of thought and loftier mind were not as well calculated for display in the conversation of a dinner-table. But, whatever his powers, Gordon showed no inclination for an encounter of tongues. There were thoughts in his heart that bowed his spirit, and he sat silent and reserved, rarely glancing at Florence, though attentive to her wishes; but occasionally turning from the animated Clanellon to the delighted

Mr. Lyle, with a troubled look and contracted brow. Once, at the commencement of the repast, he commented a little severely on a remark of Clanellon's of doubtful morality; but his lordship explained away every appearance of evil so admirably, and thanked him so frankly for having by his comment given him the opportunity of clearing himself, that Gordon interfered no more. Nor did Clanellon afford him the opportunity. Not only the brilliancy of their clothing, but the correctness—nay, elevation of his sentiments, was such as to win the approbation of the somewhat fastidious Florence, though by no means inclined to judge him favourably. Whether she believed him sincere, she was not called upon to say; and if Gordon had his suspicions, jealousy might well account for his scepticism.

"What do you think of Clanellon?" asked Mr. Lyle of Gordon as they prepared to follow the viscount to the drawing-room.

"Our acquaintance is too brief to enable me

to give a decided opinion. His conversation is brilliant."

"That it is!" replied Mr. Lyle, so absorbed in his own admiration as not to mark the cold praise of his companion. "He is a young man of a thousand, and I hope soon to call him son."

Gordon started. Yet this awoke no new fear; it only gave certainty to an old one.

"Then Miss Lyle is attached to Lord Clanellon!" he said in a hoarse voice that a cough had not cleared.

"Of course, or I should not speak so decidedly: I am not one to force her wishes. How could she be otherwise? Even I find him irresistible."

"Then Miss Lyle will certainly become Lady Clanellon?"

"I trust so! She will grace any rank; but I do not wish the matter hurried, for I would have none think that my child was lightly won. I am happy to say, that his lordship has consented to stay some days though pressed for time."

The evening witnessed a further exhibition of Lord Clanellon's *talent de plaire,* though the indifference of some of his auditory might have abashed one endowed with less self-confidence: his host was the only person who paid due homage to his powers. Gordon sat at a distance absorbed, or apparently so, in a book, (Clanellon shrewdly suspected a botanical catalogue,) and Florence plied her needle at the work which the viscount so heartily detested, though the singular shapes of one or two of the figures gratified his pique.

"Where is Mr. Gordon?" asked Clanellon of his host the next morning when breakfast was concluded and Florence had left the room.

"I ought to have apologised for his absence. He told me last night, that to ensure meeting the gentleman he was going to visit, he should set off early this morning. I was sorry for it, wishing you to see more of each other; but as his heart seemed bent on going, I yielded the point, knowing that he rarely acts without a

reason, and therefore concluding that he had a sufficient one in the present case."

"I do not doubt it," said Clanellon, checking a triumphant smile.

"You do him justice, my lord," replied the single-hearted Mr. Lyle. "If I had a son, I should wish him to resemble him. Your lordship and Walter Gordon stand alone, if I may be allowed the Irishism: I do not know your equals."

"I thank you for classing me with such a companion," replied his lordship with a sneer so ill concealed that almost any one but Mr. Lyle must have perceived it. "I thought you spoke of some folly about turning author,—that uncreditable, creditable profession — when I was last here."

"I hope he has quite given up the folly now, for he has said nothing about it lately. It would be a thousand pities—a wasting of talent, for I never met with any one better fitted for business: he really has a genius for

it—the only profitable genius, to my experience,—and I have strong hopes of persuading him to become one in my house; he will be invaluable as a partner. His want of capital I should not consider."

Mr. Lyle saw neither Clanellon's start of surprise, nor the fleeting frown that crossed his brow; and his lordship's voice, when he spoke, revealed nothing but a little doubt and embarrassment.

"Of course, you must be a competent judge of his abilities; and, a little time hence, I doubt not that the plan would be a good one."

"Better immediately, if I could accomplish it," said Mr. Lyle warmly. "I must get Florence to persuade him; they have been such good friends lately."

The man is a fool! thought Clanellon with another frown; but he did not say so, consoling himself for his silence with the reflection that fools follow where wise men lead them.

"You must be the best judge, Mr. Lyle, or

I should have thought that a little time hence would have been better than just now."

"Why so, my lord?—what can you mean?" inquired his host quickly, roused by the significance of the tone.

"Why really, Mr. Lyle, I scarcely know what to say;—in fact, you had better consider that I had no meaning—if there had been any wisdom in the remark, you must have perceived it."

"No, no, my lord; you are not one to speak without a meaning."

Clanellon bowed at the compliment, and his host proceeded—

"You try to put me off; but I see by your looks there is something I ought to know. I rely on your lordship's friendship to be candid."

"Since you place it on that footing, I can be silent no longer, however reluctant to speak. Not that I have anything important to reveal; a mere idle conversation—a nothing, that only my interest in you could have made me listen

to or remark. At the inn at Thorby I overheard a conversation beneath my window, from which I learnt that the opinion of Mr. Gordon's talents for business was very general. Something was said about a late interference of his which had strengthened this opinion; and then it was more than hinted—you will not be offended at the folly—that, but for him, your house would not have stood so high in the public estimation as it does at present. In short, they intimated that unless he became a partner immediately, the house could not stand long, as you were unequal to the task of conducting such an immense concern, — had become indolent, and were entirely guided by Mr. Sawyer. Men of sense—those who know you—must understand the folly or the malice of these remarks; but as folly unhappily preponderates in this wondrous world, in my humble opinion it would be as well to prove that you are equal to the task before you invite Mr. Gordon to become a partner: then, perhaps, his accession might

bring strength; at present, it might be considered by the ignorant as a sign of weakness. And though Mr. Gordon has, of course, not even by an inadvertent word given birth to such an idea, he might be inclined to arrogate a little: praise is a hard trial to the young—it tempts them to despise the wisdom of the old."

"Walter Gordon is not one to be too much elated with the praise he has fairly earned—and he has fairly earned all that can be given to him," replied Mr. Lyle with warmth; for his regard for the young man was sincere, founded on a knowledge of his worth, and not to be destroyed by innuendoes, however skilfully addressed; nor was the merchant's jealousy so easily stirred up as the viscount had imagined.

"Whom did you hear say these things, my lord?"

"That is more than I can tell you. When I looked out of the window, there was no one to be seen."

Here, at least, his lordship spoke truly. Whether the conversation was an entire fiction, or only an embellished truth, it would be waste of time to inquire: that it was not a simple fact—that most sublime of things, as the highly-talented author of "England and the English" so wisely tells us, I shall not hesitate to whisper.

"You did not tell me of this last night, when I told you how much I was indebted to him," remarked Mr. Lyle thoughtfully after a pause.

"The poison works," said Clanellon, but not aloud.

"I did not, Mr. Lyle, for I never report what may seem ungracious without some sufficient reason: in the words of your compliment, I do not speak without a meaning. If you remember, you did not say one word of Mr. Gordon's becoming your partner, and therefore I thought it unnecessary to repeat what I had heard, knowing his former dislike

to business, and convinced a short time would prove to all that you were first in wisdom as in wealth at Fairport. I believe I acted unwisely in naming the subject at all; but I know the credit of the wealthiest houses rests on a breath sometimes, and the admitted judgment of its head upholds it more than mines of gold. You will pardon my sincerity, Mr. Lyle; nothing but my great regard for you could have prompted me to speak."

"Not pardon, but sincerely thank you, my lord," replied the honest merchant, shaking his hand with friendly warmth.

The entrance of Florence turned the conversation; but Clanellon saw enough had been said, and was not desirous to continue it.

CHAPTER VIII.

Love, true love,—
Pang which the light think light—the wise reprove.
CROLY.

It was the fourth evening of Clanellon's visit. Gordon had returned late the night before, and was now standing in the dusky twilight, looking from one of the windows in the drawing-room. There was nothing novel in the grouping of the landscape—nothing remarkable in the falling of the shades; the scene was dim and shadowy with little to attract, yet still he lingered there. Was there a sympathy between the gloom of nature and the thoughts of his own heart? or did he make no note that the evening shadows were falling thickly round?

A deep sigh that startled him who breathed it spoke of the bosom's pain; and yet he was silent, though not alone.

At a table at some distance, a book open before her, but her eyes fixed as one who looks but does not see—whose thoughts are on the past, or "on the visioned feature bent,"—sat Florence Lyle. Mr. Lyle and Clanellon were prescribing for a lame horse and bargaining for a sound one, and Florence and Walter had been long left uninterrupted. On Gordon's first entrance he had essayed one or two remarks; but his heart was not with his words. Florence felt this, and her thoughts wandered too: the unmeaning conversation was given up as by mutual consent, and a long silence ensued.

"May I have the honour of executing any commission for you at Paris, Miss Lyle?" asked Gordon abruptly after his own deep sigh had broken through the labyrinth of thought.

Florence started from her reverie:—no won-

der, for the speaker's voice was hoarse and sounded strange after the long silence. Her own voice too in reply did not sound as it was wont: it was steady, but it had not the silver tone of former times.

"Thank you! I may send a letter: Emma will probably be in Paris by the time you return."

"I depart to-morrow morning," he remarked briefly, almost sternly.

"To-morrow morning! so soon?" she exexclaimed involuntarily, her tone intimating regret and surprise.

"So soon! Do you think it soon?" questioned Gordon with startling earnestness, advancing some hasty steps towards her;—then, stopping as suddenly as he had advanced, he exclaimed with bitterness: "Too soon?—too late! I have lingered here too long."

Florence did not speak;—the scanty light prevented his marking her changed expression, and he turned again to the window.

"This is a hasty resolve," observed Florence rather hurriedly after a pause. "Does my father know it?"

"I informed him of it this morning, and concluded he had told you: but Mr. Lyle has more important things to think of."

"And did my father consent to your departure?"

"Why should he not? I have been here a long — a very long time, and have business in Paris."

Neither the words nor the manner of uttering them were flattering.

Florence felt that they were not, and answered rather proudly.

"My father did right in not seeking to detain you, then. We cannot wonder that you have found your visit long, and neither wish nor expect that you should delay your own business for our pleasure: we already owe you too much."

"You wrong me, Miss Lyle, if you believe

that I would allow business of my own, however important, to interfere with any service I could render you or your father."

His manner was earnest, and he was evidently hurt at her altered tone. "If I spoke of my visit as long, I spoke of its effects on my future prospects, not as to my feelings; — or perhaps I feared you had grown weary of me, for I am in a gloomy mood to-night," he added with an attempt at gaiety, under which she fancied a little bitterness.

Florence rose and approached him. He heard her do so, but he did not turn. She stood beside him for a moment in silence, and then she spoke: her gentle tones were as the witching of some spell. He turned from the window:—her features, though she had approached the light, were not clearly defined; but her attitude, as she bent slightly towards him, seemed to express some doubt of her own powers to propitiate, or of his inclination to be propitiated.

"I trust this gloomy mood does not render

you suspicious. What so painful as to doubt those whom we esteem? You cannot think my father and myself ungrateful for your aid!—you will not doubt that, if we have said less than others might have said, we have only done so from feeling the inadequacy of words! You cannot, you do not leave us in the belief that we are weary of you!"

"No; I will not believe it!" he replied in a low deep voice.

"Then you remain?" she asked timidly; adding quickly, before he could reply, "My father has urged me more than once to entreat your stay; he cannot bear you from him; and Mr. Sawyer will rule again when you depart."

"Has he urged you to this lately?" he inquired eagerly.

"This day week, if you will be so precise."

"This day week!" he muttered, and again turned away, forgetting that she waited for an answer.

"Shall I tell my father you remain? Or have I asked in vain?" she added rather proudly.

"I may not—I must not stay," he replied, speaking hurriedly. "Do not let Mr. Lyle ask me why,—I can only say that it must not be! My aid is no longer needed here, and I must depart."

"Be it so, Mr. Gordon! neither my father nor myself would detain an unwilling guest."

He seemed wounded by her cold reply, and on the point of defending himself with warmth; then checking the impulse, he answered calmly and without looking towards her.

"I am sorry that my words should offend you, Miss Lyle; but I am no courtier in speech, and warned you I was in a gloomy mood."

"You did, and I deserve this rebuke for my vanity in supposing that I could charm the evil spirit."

"Do not quit me in anger," he said, gently detaining her. "We may not meet again for years—perhaps not in this life: let us not then part in pride or coldness. Forgive if I have spoken in harshness or in lightness: when the heart is wrung, then words will forth!—

when the mind is maddened, the lips know not control. I may not stay in honour; but I would have the memory of our last meeting unmarked by aught unkind."

His deep voice faltered; but before she could reply, he turned the conversation upon other topics.

"Will you not honour me with a commission?—a warning to your friend Lady Emma Dunrayne against the frivolities of Paris, or an order for a robe? In former times,"—and a sigh was heard, though he sought to repress it,—"you flattered me by praising my taste."

"Yes, in former times!" and she too sighed. "But our tastes might not agree as they did then."

"No! '*Tout cela est changé depuis que Bernadotte est devenu roi*,'" he replied.

She did not well understand the meaning of these words, but she felt that they were said in bitterness—in scorn,—a contrast to his late appeal,—and she was hurt; but before she could

speak, he again endeavoured to be gay—yet the gaiety was marred by melancholy.

"You do me wrong, Miss Lyle. You fear lest, in my present gloomy mood, I should select for you *un habit de deuil*. I will choose what is fitting your fortunes, not my own:—you will wear *un habit de noces*. You still doubt my taste, so I must leave the selection to another; but you cannot mistrust my fidelity as a carrier. Shall I take a letter to your friend?"

"She is not in Paris at present, nor do I know when she will return. Switzerland is so beautiful, her friends are loth to leave it."

"I had understood that Lord Dunrayne was still in Paris, waiting to meet his sister."

"It is perilous for any who pique themselves on their veracity to say where Dunrayne is. He was there a few days since; better, perhaps, if he stayed more at home, his habits are becoming so unsettled. Poor Dunrayne! he is an anxiety to all who regard him."

"Poor Dunrayne? Rather, happy Dunrayne!"

"In what is he happy?" asked Florence, surprised at her companion's sudden vehemence.

"I envy him—no matter why," he replied, relapsing into his former moodiness.

"You envy Lord Dunrayne?" and there was a flattering emphasis upon the *you*. "For what?"

"Perhaps for his title!" said Gordon hastily.

"His title? You sigh to be called 'my lord'? —You are above such weakness!"

"By no means; I am not the superior person you believe me. A few months since, and I would have given this right hand to be a lord. The weakness is avowed; and now despise me—scorn me."

But Florence answered gently. She saw he was in that excited state when a word can inflict a new wound—a look gangrene an old one.

"And would you also have his poverty, his pride, that will not let his heart know peace?"

"No, no! only his title!—he may retain his poverty and pride."

"Dunrayne would doubtless thank you for the permission. I know you were never great friends; but this would be the cruel partition of a foe. And thus it is through life! we will see only the good in another's lot—only the evil in our own. The means of happiness are more impartially supplied than men admit: it is we who will not use those means aright."

"Justly argued for your side of the question; but, on mine, admit that I am worse off than Dunrayne. He is only a poor lord—I am a poor commoner. The balance is decidedly in his favour."

"This is comparing yourself with only one: but do so, and you shall still lose your cause and submit to my judgment. Put a plain Mr. with high moral and intellectual

qualities into one scale; a title, with fiery and ungoverned passions, and the pride that gives itself no rest, into the other; and let poverty be in both. Now tell me, would you be Lord Dunrayne?"

"No!" he replied more gently, soothed by her sweet flattery. "As I said before, I would only have Dunrayne's title,—or any title—Lord Clanellon's would do as well;" and his bitterness returned.

"You are incorrigible, Mr. Gordon. There was a time when you looked on rank as it should be looked on,—a grade in civilised society to be supported without arrogance, honoured without servility; feeling that a peer must be judged as a commoner, and that a title sheds no lustre on its possessor unless ennobled by noble deeds. Have I not heard you say all this?"

"Possibly, in days long past. I was an imaginative youth then, living on bright visions: they have left me, and I now exist on stern

reality. I repeat, '*tout cela est changé depuis que Bernadotte est devenu roi.*'"

"I do not understand the application of those words, and greatly prefer the imaginings of your youth to the realities of your manhood. But you are maintaining an argument against your own opinions, merely for the sake of argument: your manner is forced, — your words unlike yourself. You do not really sigh for a title."

"I do! that is, I did!" he replied abruptly.

"And for what? — to take precedence in the saloon, or hear the musical ringing of 'my lord'? Had you panted to perform the deeds that have won such baubles, it would have been more like the Walter Gordon of former days."

He made no reply, but she saw that the chair on which he leant shook beneath his pressure.

"You will not tell me why you desire rank,"

she resumed, finding that he did not speak. "It was but a jest then, as I thought."

"It was no jest, Miss Lyle," he replied with startling vehemence. "You shall hear why I desire rank. If I merit contempt, I stand not alone. I would have rank that I might woo—win her I love."

"She is not worthy of your love if a title possessed or unpossessed can win or lose her love."

Florence had spoken warmly on the impulse of the moment. She stopped abruptly and looked down, though the dim light could not show the flushing of her cheek.

"Do you say this?" demanded Gordon eagerly, waiting for her answer as for his doom of life or death, his eyes flashing through the gloom.

"Do not judge so meanly of our sex as to suppose us influenced by the glitter of such baubles," she replied, striving to make firm a faltering voice.

The eager listener was disappointed: he had expected a personal answer instead of a vindication of her sex, and he spoke less earnestly and a little incredulously.

"I would not libel a whole sex, Miss Lyle; but where is the woman—young, lovely, flattered and admired, living amid pageantry and homage—a title laid at her feet, a coronet offered for her brow,—where is the woman who would put all these aside, and, rejecting pomp and place, be content with a competence and the devotion of one true heart?"

"There may be—there are such!" said Florence quickly, in a voice scarcely louder than a whisper, so soft—so timid, that it seemed meant only for one listening ear.

"Are there such?—do you know them?" exclaimed Gordon eagerly—pantingly, springing to her side.

Before Florence could speak, the door was flung open, and the butler and footman entered, bearing two splendid lamps, whose light

glared painfully on the dazzled eyes of the speakers. Involuntarily they drew apart, and gazed, or seemed to gaze, from the window.

The lamps were deposited on the table, the candles on the mantel-piece and in the brackets lighted, and the lately dark apartment was a blaze of light and splendour. The footsteps of the departing servants died away, and Florence and Walter were again alone; the latter gazing with laudable perseverance from the window, the richly draperied curtain waving to and fro with the agitation of his frame as he leant against it; the former turning occasionally on her companion a surprised and troubled look, and after a pause timidly venturing upon words.

"If as you said you would not libel our sex; then do not doubt that there are such. Woman is not the vain and heartless being you would paint her. She is not dazzled, as you think, by pomp or rank: she rates them both as far beneath the lofty mind, the generous and noble heart."

"Does she?" questioned Gordon, approaching and looking on her earnestly.

Florence did not speak—the blood rushed to her very brow, and her eyes were bent upon the ground.

It was impossible to look on the beautiful being before him and not admire. He did admire: but after a few moments came the thought that she was too brilliant for his love. She was more touching—more dangerous—more subduing in the dimness of the twilight. Now everything about, around her, was rich and costly—too rich and costly for his fortunes or his fate. Her beauty, from excitement and emotion, was more brilliant than usual,—her dress of a more splendid description. The whole party had been engaged to dine where the company was expected to be numerous; and Florence, to please her father, had put on a gayer dress, and a splendid set of ornaments, the present of her doting parent. Just before they should have set off, a note arrived to defer

the party on account of the sudden death of a relation of the host's. Florence would have taken the jewels from her hair, but her father playfully insisted on her retaining them; and she complied with a smile, only gaily lecturing him for fostering her vanity. The light from the lamps was blazing full upon her, and as Gordon turned suddenly round, he started at the brilliant vision that met his admiring gaze. The costly dress—the glittering jewels—the beauty so brilliant from excitement, formed a dazzling picture not in harmony with his late thoughts—not in sympathy with her late words. The sight was a shock to his sudden hopes. Such a being was not for him! she was fitted for that rank to which her father destined her. His eye wandered round the apartment; every object bore the same gorgeous character, and a gloom came on his brow and a chill struck to his heart. How could he hope at such a moment that such a being would forego all this for him even if her father could be won? Had they

been in her own more quiet boudoir—she in a plainer dress, with no jewels in her hair—in the misty, shadowy light of a soft summer's evening, it might have been otherwise—he might then have hoped and told his hopes;—but now —no, it could not be—he would not ask her. He should be thankful that the scene of the interview had lessened the temptation. He had said that the visions of youth had departed, and he had said truly—for him henceforth there was but stern reality.

Florence did not raise her eyes, for she knew that he was looking on her; but she knew not with what feelings, and her surprise was great when he spoke coldly and sadly.

"No, Miss Lyle, this cannot be! The young and lovely, nursed in splendours, could not resign these pomps: she would sigh and pine for their brightness through long years of weariness. No wonder! they are very beautiful—dazzling!" he added bitterly, pointing round the room.

Florence glanced at the speaker, and then round the gorgeous apartment, as his finger directed; but she looked coldly on its pomp.

"Such things may attract the eye, but they do not touch the heart. They are things of earth, and should excite only the transient admiration of the sons of earth. They merit not our regard—their loss should not cause a sigh. Do not judge so meanly of woman as to think that she could not resign all these without a murmur. She is not won by these fading gauds."

She looked up as she spoke with a full and holy confidence, more beautiful—more touching from a slight mingling of consciousness and maiden bashfulness.

"Could she resign all these without a sigh, smiling and happy in her humble home—her only jewel the unchanging love of a devoted heart—her only splendours the noble sympathies of thought?"

"She could," said Florence firmly, yet half

turning away from the eager and almost breathless questioner.

"She would not regret a title, and that station in the world which rank would give her?" he demanded with increasing earnestness.

"What is a title to a woman if she esteem not the possessor?" asked Florence, a little impatient at his doubts. "It is her value for the bearer which gives the rank its splendour in her eyes."

Gordon dropped the hand which he had taken, and drew back.

"If she value not the possessor? Ay, but if she do?—then it is a glory in her eyes—a preponderating weight in a scale that might else be balanced. Oh, woman is most noble!—most disinterested! Who shall doubt it?" he exclaimed in bitterness.

Florence was deeply wounded at his sudden change, and she too drew back in displeasure. How had she deserved this sarcasm? and why did he change so strangely and distressingly from scorn to softness, and then again to

scorn? Had he guessed a meaning in her words he did not wish, and did he thus seek to check her forwardness? — her maidenly pride blazed up at the thought. Or was he thinking of some other who had wrung his heart, and forgotten to whom he was speaking? Or could he have misunderstood her words? Could he have thought — could he have believed that she meant to admit the power of rank, striving to veil the weakness under lofty phrases?

She was still in doubt when the voices of her father and Clanellon were heard in the anteroom. Gordon walked hastily to the other end of the apartment, and taking up a paper, seated himself at a distant table. Florence sought concealment for her emotion in the recess of the window; and Clanellon, as he entered, really believed her to be looking at the rising moon, and congratulated himself on the evident estrangement between her and Gordon. He suspected at once some pique between them. Florence did not turn from the window till her presence was required at the tea-table.

When she came out into the light, Clanellon looked for some traces of emotion—some remains of the agitation he had fancied; but there were none, unless he considered as such a slight loftiness in her manner towards Gordon, an increase of frigidity when addressed by himself, and a spot of the brightest rose on either cheek, which soon faded from his view. Her duties as tea-maker were most scrupulously performed: his dislike to sugar and Gordon's partiality for it were alike remembered and regarded. She was silent; but that was nothing unusual.

"Here are the accounts from Walton," said Mr. Lyle, taking them from the servant, and turning to Gordon, who had scarcely spoken since the interruption of the *tête-à-tête*, but had sat with his face turned from observation, studying the newspaper held before him, with an industry highly praiseworthy, save that he forgot it had more sides than one.

"Then we had better look over them and make our final arrangements at once," replied

the young man, rising on the instant, apparently glad of the interruption.

"Come to my room then,—Lord Clanellon will scarcely miss us;" glancing with a meaning smile at his lordship, who, having taken a seat between Gordon and Florence, had appeared for some time completely absorbed in watching the looks and movements of the latter. Gordon did not see that the looks he watched were cold—the movements he studied the passing in and out of the detested needle.

"By the bye, Florence," observed her father with some slight embarrassment as he was leaving the room, "I suppose Walter has told you that he goes early to-morrow morning, and will take anything for you to Paris. I forgot to mention it before."

"Mr. Gordon did tell me; but as Emma is still in Switzerland, I will not trouble him."

No further remark was made, and the two gentlemen left the room; but as Gordon closed the door behind him, he saw Clanellon turn

towards Florence and address her in an earnest manner: he was too distant to distinguish words. The door was closed with greater force than was required.

Florence made no reply to the low remark, which indeed required none; but she drew back haughtily from Clanellon's approach.

"Mr. Gordon is going to join Sir Charles Cleveland and his sister, is he not?" asked the viscount carelessly.

"Yes."

"A very delightful person, worthy even of Mr. Gordon's friendship. I think your father said you knew him."

"Only by report."

"Miss Cleveland, I understand, is a most lovely, fascinating creature; a fitting sister for Gordon's friend,—all soul, and grace, and feeling. No wonder he is in such haste to return; they are never quite happy but when he is with them. Do you know Miss Cleveland?"

"3, 4, 5; 1, 2, 3. I do not," replied Flo-

rence calmly, putting in her needle at the counted thread.

A denunciation against the work and the worker was with difficulty suppressed, as, taking up the newspaper with a yawn, he began studying its contents.

"Now that all is explained and arranged," said Gordon to Mr. Lyle as they sat together in the latter's room, "you will, I trust, pardon me if I warn you once more against Mr. Sawyer. Though unable to prove him dishonest, it is my firm conviction that if honest, it is self-interest alone that keeps him so. The less you leave to him the better; the more closely you look into everything yourself, the safer will you be."

"Never give advice with such awful solemnity, Walter; it is enough to frighten one into the insolvency you dread. The man is not as bad as you think him, who never liked him from the first,—some phrenological fancy, I believe; but I have seen a little of the world,

and know what he really is. Should he try to play the rogue, I think I could see and thwart him. Robert Lyle, with his experience, is not so easily deceived as some imagine: though not as quick in his acts and judgment as the young, he can still penetrate evil schemes when such exist. You need not fear for him,—he is no baby to be humbugged with a soft word," replied Mr. Lyle in evident pique.

The blood rushed to the open brow of Gordon. It was the first appearance of misunderstanding between himself and Mr. Lyle, save in the matter of quitting his roof, and coming just at this moment when they were going to part perhaps for ever, and after a day of suffering and excitement, it pressed sorely and heavily upon him. Mr. Lyle's ready acquiescence in his proposed departure,—or rather, his worse than ready acquiescence — his faint and civil remonstrance before he yielded, as though endeavouring to veil from himself and from his hearer some secret injustice,—awakened

the idea in Gordon's mind that his absence would be welcome. The omitting to name his departure to Florence, and his embarrassment when naming it, converted the suspicion into a galling certainty; whilst his present hinted rebuke for officiousness pained him almost beyond endurance, and it was with difficulty he answered with tolerable calmness.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Lyle, I had no intention of forcing on you unasked advice: you had consulted me before on these things, or I should not have spoken on them now. No personal dislike to Mr. Sawyer prompted my words, and I could have no interest in what I said but to warn one to whom I shall ever hold myself highly indebted. We will not name the subject again."

"If I have said anything to wound you, believe me I did not mean it: I value your advice only a little less highly than your aid," said Mr. Lyle, forgetting his pique, and holding out his hand with the open warmth of former times.

Gordon grasped the extended hand. They should not part in anger—that would be some relief.

"To be sure, Sawyer has a winning tongue; so suppose, after you have had a run in Paris, you return and become my partner: we shall not quarrel about terms. In four or five months' time," said Mr. Lyle with a return of his former embarrassment, for he felt conscious of an unworthy suspicion, a mean yielding to vanity.

Gordon looked steadily at him without speaking.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure. Walter. Come, you shall have no cause to complain of fortune. You shall take Sawyer's place, and be to me as a son. I may want some one to console me then," he added with a touch of sadness.

Gordon shuddered; yet his companion had urged him with his usual sincerity—it was evident that he only desired his absence for a few months.

"You will come, Walter, will you not? Say at the end of six months, or four—or your own time," he added still more earnestly, receiving no reply.

"When Miss Lyle shall have become Lady Clanellon, you mean," said Gordon with an unnatural calmness that would have been awful to any one more observing than Mr. Lyle;—he was only annoyed at it, he knew not why.

"That is what I mean; but I dare say Florence will ask you to her wedding." Gordon started as if stung by some deadly reptile, rose abruptly, and paced the room with long and hurried strides.

What could the body's movements do for the heart's wound? There wanted but this—and the day's suffering was complete, he thought.

Mr. Lyle looked on him in alarm and surprise. He spoke some soothing words, though he knew not the disease; but his companion

did not heed them—he still paced the room with hasty steps.

"What is the matter, Walter?" asked Mr. Lyle, staying his hurried walk by laying a firm but friendly hold upon his arm.

Gordon tried to shake off his grasp, but made no reply.

"What is the matter?" again asked Mr. Lyle more earnestly.

"The matter!" repeated Gordon wildly. "Nothing!—there is nothing the matter!"

"But there is something the matter, Walter; you are ill! very ill!" shrinking as he spoke from his fiery and feverish glance.

"Ill! yes, very ill!—but what then? there are none to care;" and throwing off the hand that held him, he resumed his hurried walk.

"Not care, Walter? This is unkind! We all care for you. I love you!—Florence loves you!"

"Does she? Ask her!" exclaimed Gordon bitterly.

All this bitterness and emotion was a mystery to Mr. Lyle; but after a few moments of silent consideration, he thought he had fathomed it, and acted accordingly. His young favourite was hurt at not being asked to become one of the firm at once: he considered the delay, and his being so readily allowed to depart, as an unmerited slight after his important services. This was not a very extraordinary conjecture for a merchant who prided himself on the high standing of his house; whilst the promptness with which he acted on the conclusion proved his great regard for the son of his old friend. The suggestions of his vanity aroused by Clanellon were hushed at once; and he was frank and kind as ever.

"I see what it is, Walter. You think we are ungrateful; but we are not, my dear boy. You shall not go—you shall stay with us: Florence and Clanellon will regard you as a brother—you shall become a partner at once and be to me as a son."

"It cannot be! I must depart!" and the young man's voice sounded so hollow that his hearer was alarmed.

"Why must you depart, Walter? I implore — I command you as a father to tell me."

"Because I dare not remain," replied Gordon wildly, stopping abruptly in his walk, and fronting his questioner with features convulsed by strong emotion.

"Dare not remain? What do you mean? I would hear some reason," said the bewildered merchant.

The painful emotions—the succeeding irritations of the day, had left Gordon scarcely master of himself: his brain seemed on fire — his thoughts were wild and indistinct, and some powerful impulse he was too feeble to control urged him to reveal that which he had so long and anxiously sought to conceal.

"You shall have a reason, Mr. Lyle,—my meaning shall be made clear! I love your

daughter — I have long loved her — I cannot cease to love her. My tale is told. Now bid me depart at once."

The impetuous passion that had impelled his confession subsided as he concluded; the boiling blood flew back to his heart, and he stood before the father with the livid look and the glazed eye of a corpse.

"My poor Walter! I never guessed this!" said Mr. Lyle in a tone of such deep, sincere compassion, that the sufferer did not revolt at the sympathy. "I know what it is to love and not be loved," he continued with glistening eyes. "But Florence was mine after a while, and I was blessed with her for years."

"But I—I may not hope that?" exclaimed Gordon eagerly, again starting into hope and action.

"No, that cannot be!" said Mr. Lyle gently. If I had known this sooner, perhaps it might have been, though I cannot say. I do not require fortune—there is a dormant title in your

family, and I regard you as a son : but it is too late now—she loves Clanellon, and a father cannot be blamed for wishing his child, and such a child, to fill a station that so well befits her."

" Enough ! Say no more ! I desire no excuse—I ask no favour," interrupted Gordon quickly, to whom this explanation—or, more properly speaking, involuntary utterance of thoughts—the excusing of himself to himself where no accusation had been made—had been exquisite torture. " I shall depart on the instant—you can no longer wish to detain me."

" No, no, Walter ! you must not leave me yet ;" and he pressed his hand, compelling him to take a seat beside him ; " you must not go yet : you shall not leave me in anger. I must have often pained you when I thought to give you pleasure. You must forgive me, Walter ! I never knew—I never guessed this ! Did my child ?"

" I know not," replied Gordon with tolerable

calmness, for the entire sympathy of his companion was too apparent not to soothe him even whilst his words were adding to his pangs.

The pride, the vanity of the merchant—every mean, unworthy feeling was at rest. Walter's confession had recalled to his mind the memory of his own early days; he had once felt as Gordon now felt, allowing for the difference of character, and every other consideration was at the moment swallowed up in compassion for his sufferings. If his words pained—if he did not console as skilfully as he compassionated sincerely, the fault was Nature's, and not his. He would at that moment have given half his wealth to save Gordon further pain; he even once doubted as to the possibility of breaking off the union with Clanellon, the event on which he had most set his heart. These things were not lost on the young man, who saw them with gratitude and strove to check his impatience.

"I never told Miss Lyle," Gordon con-

tinued. "It was long before I understood my own feelings—not till they had acquired a force that startled even myself. It was not only that I had seen your daughter day after day in the intimacy of friendship, and had not seen her with indifference; she had become a portion of my being,—thoughts, hopes, and fears, like the radii of a circle, centred in her. To be worthy of her must hereafter lend hope its brightness; their sympathy with hers must give to thoughts and feelings their value and their beauty. I trembled at my own presumption—at the boldness of my love; and yet I would not have yielded that love for aught else that earth could offer. I was silent—I dared not speak either to you or her. I might have been banished, and I shrunk with terror from the thought. You know the danger in which it was my happiness to aid Miss Lyle: as I bore her fainting from the carriage, the impulse of gratitude for her preservation overpowered my prudence, and a passionate exclamation of ten-

derness escaped me. I knew not then if she had heard me; I afterwards concluded that she had. She murmured something—what I could not tell,—but as soon as she could speak distinctly, bade me leave her. I departed in sadness; and when next we met, even whilst tendering her thanks, there was a restraint — a coldness in her manner, which told too plainly that I was despised—rejected. Your kindness, supposing I had received some injury, judging by my changed appearance, at times soothed, at others maddened me. I had not then learned the self-control which I have since acquired; a self-control that this last day has sorely tried, and proved can fail. Moved by the innumerable instances of your regard—feeling as a guilty creature whilst cherishing my love in secret, I was on the point of confessing all, leaving it to you to banish me for my presumption, or permit me to hope the effect of time: the words were on my lips, when you told me of your desire—I should say, your re-

solve—that Miss Lyle should wed with rank. You added some remarks on the dishonourable conduct of a young clerk who had lately sought to gain the affections of a rich merchant's daughter, to whom he was indebted for the very means of subsistence. You did not guess my feelings; you did not mean the remarks for me—I knew you did not—and they came with a double force. I could not tell the agony of that and many succeeding moments—enough that it was borne! but I would not bear it again for the world's wealth. I saw myself what you had described another,—a reptile—stinging the bosom which had cherished him! my only excuse, that with the generosity—the recklessness of youth, the wise would say, I did not value riches as the experienced did, whilst your kindness, your affection, had prevented my thinking of the disparity between our fortunes. There was but one honourable course, and I pursued it. I had received uncounted favours at your hands—I was bound

in gratitude not to thwart your wishes. True, Miss Lyle was calm,—more—cold and restrained; but I felt my passion would burst forth in some moment of excitement, paining her and you. I saw too that she wished my absence. I listened to your remonstrance—I bore your reproofs—but I did not falter. You thought me cold, fickle, and ungrateful: I was neither. Had you seen me when I knew no human eye was on me, you would have pitied, not condemned. I was going out alone into the world from those I most prized on earth—from the only spot I could call my home!

"You parted with me in kindness, mingled with reproach: Miss Lyle bade me farewell with cold and formal wishes for my welfare. For a time, I turned from society with disgust; and in the silence and solitude of Nature, with none to commune with me but my God, I sought to temper down the spirit that rebelled—to bend its energies towards the good of others. I did not forget your daughter: I determined

to merit her esteem, though beneath her love. She could not be mine, and I endeavoured to accustom myself to consider her as another's. If I deceived myself in believing that my mind was reconciled to the idea, the blame and the suffering are mine alone! let no other meddle with them!

"When summoned to her presence, I believed it by your desire; and I dared to hope, that could I prove myself deserving the trust, you might in time, without any dishonourable attempts on my part, learn to look upon me as a son indeed. The discovery that I had been summoned—was to be employed, without your knowledge and only at the suggestion of Walton, damped my hopes, but not my zeal. I felt all the risk of failure; but I was flattered by her confidence. I would have done her bidding though it had led to torture or a death of shame: it was a triumph and a glory to have forced her to esteem me.

"I succeeded! Under Providence, I had saved her from loss of life and loss of fortune.

These were blessings to be remembered during life—even at the point of death.

"I was called to your presence. Your post-script showed that you thought the note was cold: your words—your manner told the same. Again I hoped. What might not time effect! I overheard you chiding your daughter for her restraint; you threw us together—you appeared to wish to excite a sympathy between us: I believed you understood my feelings, and approved them. My hopes rose, colouring my manner, and I flattered myself that Miss Lyle's coldness was disappearing. In the brightest moment of anticipation, when hope rose almost to certainty, Lord Clanellon came. His first glance showed me he was a rival,—your words told me, a successful one,—and I departed in the morning, for I dared not trust myself in his society.

"Again had my hopes been crushed—and I wanted time and thought to bear that crushing as I should.

"I returned to complete my arrangements

and then depart for ever. Lord Clanellon looked the triumphant lover—my hastened departure caused you no annoyance—I believed you wished it;—none would regret my absence. Miss Lyle appeared to understand some of my feelings; but she regretted the cause of my departure, not the departure itself. I thought she guessed my suffering, and delicately checked the flow of her own happiness to spare me further pain. She has been ever the same;—uniform in her coldness—and I may add, her consideration. If, urged by my hopes, I twice thought those hopes might be realised—that her coldness had relaxed or been mistaken, I have dearly paid for the transient brightness by a deeper gloom. I should rejoice in this. Had she participated in my feelings, I could not have withstood the temptation: it is hard to do so even now, when the avowal of my love would but increase her coldness. Where is he who is worthy of her? I shall not see her—but I cannot forget her!"

The speaker paused, breathless and overcome by this impetuous burst: it renewed the anguish of the past, and yet he felt relieved that all was known—that the necessity of concealment no longer existed.

"You should have told me this before," said Mr. Lyle, laying his hand affectionately on his shoulder, and looking sadly and kindly on him. "I love you, and it might have been otherwise: now it is too late!"

Gordon shrunk at his words, but spoke after a little time with tolerable calmness.

"I have told you all, Mr. Lyle, lest, when far away, you should think over the past and visit me with blame,—deeming me ungrateful, which I cannot be. It will be a satisfaction should we meet no more: you will do me justice now—you know me as I am. Perhaps I should have told you all before; but lovers do not act as other men—they hold it almost profanation to hint what others jest on. I did not tell my tale to excite your pity: I should

have gone in silence, but your kindness moved me. It is vain to talk of what might have been —more than enough has been said; let the subject never again be named between us. I feel all your kindness, but to thank you would unman me. You will forgive me my presumption!" and taking the hand still resting on his shoulder, he pressed it with respectful affection to his lips. Mr. Lyle suppressed a sob.

"I will not ask you to stay now, my noble boy; but hereafter—months, years hence—if you will, when your feelings shall have been calmed by time and absence, and I shall be left alone — the light of my home departed—you will come back then, Walter, will you not?"

"Ask it not! ask it not!" he said earnestly, deeply touched by the old man's pleading. "I have a part to play in the world, and it must be played. The most insignificant can yet do something for his brethren's good, and I dare not unman myself by abiding here. I could not be where she has been, and feel at peace.

She would be ever before me, with her silver voice and her bright sunny smile, and her calm clear eye that would win the faithless to belief. I should know no rest—her image would be in all things, troubling the calmness I would fain acquire. No! no! I will not again come where she has been!—I will never see her more. She is not yet another's—to-night I may look upon her, but I cannot—I will not see her Clanellon's bride! I could not look on him with a Christian feeling. He has triumphed in my suffering—I forgive him that; let him love her as she deserves, and I will not judge him harshly. He loves her now; and that love must purify the heart. May they be happy!"

"I will not ask it now then, Walter; but we must meet again. I could not die in peace if I saw you not; and you must think of me as a father—a fond father, and receive from me a son's portion. It is a simple thought to become an author: you have saved me tens of thou-

sands — you will not pain me by refusing part of what you have preserved ?"

" Pardon me, this must not be !" interrupted Gordon quickly. " I would not pain you by refusing ; you must not pain me by the offering. You had a claim on my services for your past kindness. On this point I am resolute : I could not brook it — I should feel as if I had yielded up my love for gold. I have more than enough for my simple wants ; and should I meet with the deserving who require aid above my means, I will not scruple to apply to you."

Mr. Lyle would have pressed the point, but there was that in Gordon's demeanour which compelled him to silence.

" All is now arranged," said Gordon with unnatural calmness. " If you will return to the drawing-room, I will follow shortly and bid Miss Lyle farewell. I would be alone," he added as his kind companion still lingered.

" Would you take leave of Florence here ?"

asked her father kindly, delicately turning away lest his looks should confuse his guest.

"I thank you for the offer, but I dare not."

It was so long before Gordon re-entered the drawing-room, that Florence rose to retire.

"Do not go yet, my child," said her father, rousing from a reverie. "Gordon will be here in a moment to wish you good-b'ye."

"Shall we not see him at breakfast?"

"No; we have agreed it will be better that he should start very early."

Florence resumed her seat and her work: but the work of the night was cut out in the morning. She had answered calmly and indifferently, for she knew that Clanellon's eye and ear were open; but she was agitated by her father's manner and with difficulty concealed her emotion. Some explanation must have taken place! She thought her father no longer mentioned his departure as a subject of indifference or pleasure, but as a sad

necessity, and she saw plainly that he had been strongly moved.

Gordon entered the room soon after. Suffering was traced on his pallid cheek—but suffering struggled against, subdued, and his step was firm as he approached the silent group.

"Past twelve!" he exclaimed, his eye resting for a moment on the dial-plate of a French clock, whose supporters were a Cupid playfully clipping the wings of Time. "I had no idea it had been so late. I hope none have sat up on my account."

"We could not retire without wishing you farewell, though Miss Lyle rose for that purpose some time since," replied Clanellon with the most finished politeness.

"I was not aware when I did so that Mr. Gordon departed so early," observed Florence coldly.

"I am sorry to have delayed your retiring, but beg I may do so no longer."

Florence folded up her work with an extra-

ordinary particularity, bending closely over it that every fold might be laid aright; then putting it slowly aside, she rose and took the candle which Gordon had lighted and was holding ready for her. "Farewell, Mr. Gordon, since we shall not see you in the morning. We can never forget how much we owe you; and our best wishes will be with you, wherever you may be."

"Heaven bless you!" was all that Gordon could trust himself to say, as he pressed with convulsive energy the hand she held towards him, and then, relinquishing it abruptly, turned away.

Never again should he press that hand!—never again meet that trembling touch!—When next they met, if they met on earth, she would be a wife—the wife of another!

The light flame of the candle flickered and wavered from the trembling of the hand that held it; but Gordon saw it not. Clanellon was holding open the door with his usual

politeness; and her father had risen to give his child his customary blessing and embrace. Florence pressed her lips to her father's brow as he bent over her—remained for an instant folded in his arms, her face hid on his shoulder,—and then, passing Clanellon with a cold "good night" and stately bow, she left the room.

Provoked at her conduct throughout the evening, Clanellon had every inclination to vent his ill-humour upon Gordon in the shape of some polite impertinences; but he looked at him, and gave up the thought, not from policy —not from fear,—but from pity. The ashy cheek and the livid lip pleaded for an immunity from further pain: they awakened almost a friendly feeling, proving the abandonment of his high hopes.

"Good night, and good b'ye! and all good things!" said Clanellon with a warmth that surprised the person addressed.

"I thank you, Lord Clanellon, and return

your wishes," replied Gordon, just touching the extended hand, but shuddering as he did so.

Mr. Lyle wished to say a great deal, without knowing how to say it; but Gordon shortened the leave-taking as much as possible.

"Heaven bless you, Walter, at all times and in all places! and remember, if you should change your mind, that you will always find a home at Atherton — a father in Robert Lyle."

"Thank you—thank you, sir!" was all Walter could say in reply.

"Remember, we must hear from you occasionally."

"Yes, sir; and now farewell!"

"Farewell, my child; for you are as a second child to me."

Mr. Lyle turned away to enter his own room, and Gordon hastily closed and locked the door behind him. He was now alone; the day's

agony was past — his task performed. There were none to see him — none to mock ; he had parted with those he loved the best ; he should go forth on the morrow an outcast and alone— a wanderer through the wilderness of life ! but he would not go forth without a hope !

" There is a world beyond the grave."

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